

i want us both to eat well

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i want us both to eat well

by [winnix](#)

Summary

In the lead up to George's move to Florida, and in the first few weeks following his arrival, Dream learns to show how much he cares in new ways. Namely, through food. George responds in kind.

or, Dream and George fall in love in the kitchen.

Notes

“I’m doing a balancing act with a stack of fresh fruit in my basket. I love you. I want us both to eat well.”

— Christopher Citro, “Our Beautiful Life When It's Filled With Shrieks”

happy reading!

A Loaf of Bread

When Dream was little, his mom taught him how to make bread.

The process was simple, easy enough for even a small child to understand. Flour, yeast, water, salt. Kneading into the dough in careful, practiced motions, until your fingers were coated with starch, until it could be rolled up into a ball and placed in a bowl to rise. Standing in their kitchen, back before Dream was called *Dream*, back before he'd grown up and gone to school, gotten his first job, met his best friends, started a new life he never could've predicted, the world still felt small and malleable. Easily pocketable. The type of life you could cup gently in your hands. In the sun filled room, the walls the exact same color as scrambled eggs, his mother would turn over her shoulder and smile at him, the fresh baked loaf held gently in her grasp.

"Come here," she'd say, and Dream would come stand next to her, perched on his tip toes, neck craning up. "Listen."

His mother would tap her knuckles lightly against the crust of the bread, a secret smile on her mouth, and Dream would grin back, listening to the sharp, satisfying noise.

"We did a good job," she'd say, and Dream would nod.

"Yeah," he'd agree. "We did."

These days, Dream didn't have much time for baking, let alone baking with his mom. His days were so packed, simultaneously uneventful due to the fact that he rarely left his house and overwhelmingly busy, meetings stacked on top of each other so tightly that he barely had the chance to breathe. For the past few months, everything had been stuck in a holding pattern - projects stalled due to scheduling conflicts, videos delayed, streams pushed back. Sometimes, all the waiting he was doing sat like a physical presence on his chest, pressing heavy against his lungs, rendering him inert. All he could do was lie in bed, his inaction making his brain turn to mush in his skull.

The milestones continued mounting. He was on track, he was successful, he knew what he wanted his future to look like and exactly what he had to do to get there. And yet.

And yet.

It was difficult to feel motivated when it felt like the progress that mattered, the one thing he truly cared about achieving above all else, felt so out of reach. It was out of his hands, he knew this, but still, after so many years spent waiting, being on the precipice of something still unattainable felt agonizing. He was frustrated, quick to fall into cynical spirals, eager to bow out of any sort of obligation that wasn't 100% necessary. He became obsessive, desperate, frantic, glued to his phone for hours on end, unwilling to have the same sort of casual conversations he used to find himself falling into easily. What was the point? There was nothing more to say, nothing he could pretend to care about more than the cavernous, all consuming want he found himself sinking further and further into.

That's what he'd become. A person defined by what he didn't have. Or, more accurately, *who* he didn't have. And it was starting to really drive him crazy.

Then, one night, somewhere tucked between the first hours before dawn, his phone rings. Dream's eyes snap open, his sleep thin and easily disturbed, and he reaches forward, accepting the call

before his brain fully awakens.

“Wait, wait,” he insists, his voice hoarse, brain still foggy and sluggish. “Slow down.”

“I got it, I got it, it’s here, it just came in the mail,” George’s voice comes through, breathless and raw, as if he’d just been crying. That realization makes Dream sit up abruptly in bed, even before the words he’s saying register fully.

“What?” Dream asks, his eyes searching the darkness of his room for some sort of anchor to hold on to.

“The visa is here, I’m holding it,” George says, letting out a bubbling laugh, so bright Dream swears he can feel the heat of it against his face, even thousands of miles away. “Dream, it’s here, it just arrived this morning. I woke up, and it was just sitting there, in my mailbox, I mean - I didn’t even - Dream, I’m *holding* it.”

Dream lets out a shaky breath, all the weight of the past few months catching up to him all at once. In a moment, his eyesight has gone blurry with tears.

“Oh my God,” he murmurs. “George.”

“Dream!” George exclaims, lost in another fit of shocked laughter. Dream hasn’t heard him laugh like that in ages, the sort of laughter that threatens to tumble into hysterics, that makes Dream’s chest feel lighter just by hearing it.

It had been so long since Dream felt proud of something. Real, genuine pride. Not the type of pride that people congratulated you for, but the kind that made you feel as if your life, no matter how short and insignificant it felt, had real meaning. The type of shit that made you get out of bed in the morning, that made all the hard stuff feel worth it. That’s what it felt like, hearing George laugh like that, so joyous it sounded like it might spill right out of him and flood the whole world. Like everything before now had been some sort of trial and this, *this*, was the real thing.

“We did it,” Dream says, staring down at his hands, trying to force his thoughts into some coherent shape.

“Yeah,” George agrees, and Dream can hear his smile, even if he can’t see it yet. “We did.”

Dream doesn’t get another moment of sleep that night. The next few hours are spent confirming details, finally putting the plans into motion that had been on hold for so long. When Sapnap wakes up a few hours later, Dream tells him while George is still on over speaker phone, and he watches his best friend, the person he’s known since they were both kids, wipe hasty tears from his eyes, an embarrassed flush coming over his cheeks.

“That’s great, George,” he says, his voice thick. “I’m, uh- I’m really happy to hear that.”

“Are you *crying*?” George interrupts, ever-observant. “Dream, is he crying?”

“Uh...” Dream says, shrugging helplessly at Sapnap, who shoots him a silencing glare.

“Oh, please, as if you guys weren’t a fucking mess about this too,” he sniffs sharply, rubbing his hand under his nose. “Dream’s a baby, he probably cried *way* more than me.”

“He definitely did,” George agrees with an easy laugh.

“Hey!” Dream interjects. “George cried too!”

“I did not,” George lies, his voice still bright with laughter. Sapnap pouts for a moment, looking as if he might press the matter, but then a smile tugs on the corner of his lips. Dream matches his expression, unable to hide his grin, and Sapnap lets out a loud, exuberant laugh.

“George!” He exclaims, all posturing forgotten. “What the fuck! You’re actually coming here!”

“I am!” George confirms, and Dream feels like his heart might explode, watching Sapnap pick up the phone from the desk and talk animatedly into it, already rattling off the long, *long* list of things he wants to do once George arrives.

The phone call spirals, and by the time George hangs up hours later, elated and exhausted, all the plans have been finalized. His plane ticket has been booked. In five days, all the distance between them will be erased. No more ocean, no more differing time zones and conflicting sleep schedules, no more voices broken over phone lines. No more waiting.

The relief is so strong, Dream feels near euphoric with it. He collapses back onto his bed, eyes drawn to the ceiling overhead, smiling to himself like an idiot. Sapnap had long since retreated to this own room, off to do some stream with Punz, and for the first time all day, Dream is left alone with his own thoughts.

Five days, and George would be here, with him, not just for a visit, but to stay. That’s the part that Dream was still struggling to wrap his head around. This wasn’t a trip, one that would be cut short in a few weeks’ time. George was coming to *live* with them, to build his life in a part of the world that he’d never even seen before.

Dream’s stomach lurches sharply at the thought. All of a sudden, the euphoric high begins to sink, a once buoyant ship taking on water.

He’ll like it here, he insists to himself. *Of course he will. Why wouldn’t he?*

It’s not like George had ever been a particularly picky person. He lived in London because that’s where he was from, not because he had some sort of unique fondness for it. He could learn to love Florida. *Right?*

All of a sudden, Dream’s skin feels stretched too thin, and his heartbeat is far too loud in his ears. A thick coil of discomfort creeps its way up his body, curling itself around his chest, and he sits up hurriedly, suddenly feeling desperate for movement. Swinging his feet over the edge of his bed, he stands up, walking to his window and then back towards his desk, his hands itching for something to do.

George’s room was already set up, down the hall from his own. In fact, it had been set up for what was probably an embarrassing amount of time, long before the visa was anywhere close to being approved. But would George like it? Would he find it too cold, too impersonal? Or what if Dream tried to decorate it - would George suddenly feel suffocated, like he didn’t have his own space in the house?

And the *heat*. Dream knew George didn’t like cold weather, but what about hot weather, truly hot weather, the sort of heat that only existed during Floridian summers, that made merely leaving the house feel like a Herculean undertaking? Dream had grown up in Florida and sometimes that heat was too much even for him. How could he expect George to adapt?

Dream sits down heavily in his desk chair, his leg bouncing. It was impossible to not feel the burden of responsibility when *he* was the thing drawing George here. With Sapnap, it had been different. He had a better idea of what he was getting into, and they always had the option of

backing out, of making their living arrangement temporary. Thankfully, they never had to, and Dream was grateful Sapnap liked living with him as much as he enjoyed living with Sapnap. But with George, there was no plan B. No easy way out, no chance for George to change his mind. He was all in, and he had been from the very beginning.

George had never been a very emotionally forthcoming person, but what he left unsaid in words he practically screamed with his actions. That sort of willingness to commit, that level of devotion - it left Dream feeling a bit overwhelmed sometimes. Dream was a person who enjoyed being tested. He liked proving himself, over and over again if needed, until he felt as if he'd truly earned whatever he'd been given. And while George *did* ask things of him sometimes (Dream had lost track of the number of times he'd begged him to edit one of his videos), at the core of their relationship was this constant, unwavering commitment, the kind that was given with little to no expectation on George's part.

Dream knew he was a good friend, and a good collaborator. He knew people liked him (the people that mattered, at least) and that the friends he had weren't the type of people whose love he had to earn. And yet.

And yet.

With George, it had to be perfect. That's what George deserved, even if it wasn't what he expected.

Dream stands from his chair, practically buzzing with nervous energy. All of a sudden, five days felt like a near impossible time frame. There was too much to do, too much to prepare for. He should really buy new furniture for George's room. Sure, the stuff in there was new but it could be newer. And food, too. God, did they even have any food? Dream needed to buy food.

Ten minutes later, when Dream is in the midst rifling through their kitchen cabinets, trying to take stock of what they have, his phone rings in his pocket. Dream frowns, pausing his inspection of an old jar of jam he found tucked back on a shelf. He's almost sure he put his phone on Do Not Disturb earlier that evening. It takes another second for his brain to register that yes, he did do that, which means the only person whose call he could be receiving is -

"Hey," Dream greets when he picks up, pressing his phone between his shoulder and ear. "Everything alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, everything's fine," George assures easily. "What's your zip-code again? I know I wrote it down somewhere but I can't find it, and there's a million PC parts I need to get shipped to the house."

"I'll text it to you," Dream says, finally setting the jam back down and closing the cabinet, taking his phone in hand once more. He sets it down on the counter, putting George on speaker. "You know, I can just order all this stuff-"

"Dream, I got it," George insists, chuckling. "You already bought my plane ticket. And a bunch of stuff for my room. And the house I'm moving into."

"I know, I know," Dream says, his tone sheepish. "Sorry, I just...thought I'd offer."

George is quiet for a moment. Dream can hear some white noise in the background, so faint it's hard to make out. After a moment, he realizes what he's hearing is the sound of rain, hitting the roof of George's flat.

"Is it raining there?" He asks, opening another cabinet. He's greeted with a bag of flour, unopened,

clearly placed there by his mother at some point. Dream tugs it out.

“Yeah,” George confirms. “Been raining for, like, three days straight. I can’t wait to move somewhere sunny, you have no idea.”

“You know, it rains in Florida too,” Dream says, setting the bag of flour down on the kitchen counter in front of him. “Like, *really* rains. You’ve never seen a hurricane before.”

“Yeah, but that’s different,” George insists. “It rains here all the time. It’s exhausting. Makes me feel all...damp.”

“Ew,” Dream laughs, crinkling up his nose.

“Shut up,” George shoots back, but Dream can hear him laughing as well. There’s another brief pause as George adjusts himself in his chair - the sound is so familiar to Dream at this point, he can practically envision the movement in his head.

“Tell me more about Florida,” George says after a moment, his voice suddenly much quieter than before. Dream sighs, pressing his hands into the cool marble of the counter and leaning his weight down against it.

“Well, uh, it is sunny,” he begins lamely. “And hot. Really hot. But nice in the winter, I guess. Uh, there are a lot of beaches. And palm trees. And some cool places to visit around the city. But I don’t...I just...”

He trails off, ducking his head down and letting a sigh escape from his lips.

“What?” George prompts.

“I’m worried you aren’t gonna like it,” Dream admits honestly. He’d never been all that good at hiding, particularly around George. To his surprise, George lets out a laugh.

“Oh,” he says. “Why? Do you not like it?”

“No, no!” Dream insists, a bit embarrassed by his own haste. “I like it! I just...I really want you to like it too, I guess. And I’m worried you’re gonna get here, and be expecting one thing, and then be...I don’t know. Disappointed.”

Another silence settles between them. Somewhere in the background, in a part of the world Dream can’t see, it continues to rain.

“Hm,” is all George says. Dream frowns down at his phone.

“Hm?” He echoes, incredulous. “Come on, George. You gotta give me a bit more than that.”

“So needy,” George chides, but his voice is affectionate, soft in a way Dream only ever hears on their private calls. It makes him smile, despite the pit of anxiety churning in his stomach. “I think I’ll like it.”

Dream pauses, taken aback by the simplicity of his words.

“You do?”

“Sure,” George says, and Dream can practically hear him shrug, picture the soft rise and fall of his shoulders in the fabric of whatever hoodie he’s got on. “I like amusement parks, and warm weather. And the sun. But I’m not moving there for that, silly.”

Dream stares down at the dark, reflective surface of his phone, such a stark contrast from the warmth flowing out of George's voice. Absently, Dream wonders how many people get to hear George when he sounds like this - amused and sweet, too caught up in their conversation to put on any sort of show. A part of Dream, one that he should probably do a better job of keeping under wraps, feels a surge of possession rise within him. The way George sounds with him, right now - that's something he wants to keep only for himself.

"What are you moving here for, then?" Dream asks, a small smirk rising on his lips. He knows, *of course* he knows, but sometimes, he just really wants to hear George say it.

George lets out a short huff of breath. "Shut up."

"No, really," Dream pushes slightly, feeling a bit giddy. "I mean, if not for the amusement parks."

"*Dream*," George groans.

"Oh, come on," Dream says, letting his head fall forward. "You can admit it. It's just us."

Another pause as George reorients himself in his desk chair again. Dream takes his lower lip between his teeth, feeling marginally victorious. He's making him squirm.

"Fine," George says. "I'm sick of having to mail you hard drives. It'll be easier to make you edit for me when we're in the same house."

Dream laughs. "Now who's being needy?"

"I am *not* needy!" George insists, but Dream can hear the smile in his voice. "I'm strategic. I know you won't be able to say no to me in person."

Shit. He's got him there.

"Sure I can," Dream replies, but it's already too late. He can hear George's amused snicker, far too cocky for his own good.

"You keep telling yourself that, *Dream*," George says, his voice dripping with confidence in a way that makes Dream dwell a bit more on his tone, on the way his lips curve around the words. If he shuts his eyes, he can imagine it perfectly. Deliberately, he doesn't, choosing instead to turn his gaze upwards, towards the ceiling.

"It's getting late there, isn't it?" Dream asks, only partially hoping for a change in topic, a last ditch attempt at preserving some of his dignity.

"I guess," George mutters.

"You should go to bed," Dream suggests gently. "We both should."

"Yeah, but you won't," George says. Dream bites back a smile. George knew him so well, sometimes it felt a bit eerie. Like they were both operating out of the same brain.

"Ok, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't," he insists. "Come on, Georgie. Bed time. We've got a busy few days ahead of us."

"You're so bossy," George groans, but Dream can already hear him rising from his chair.

"You love it," Dream says without thinking. George lets out a small cough, and Dream can immediately feel the back of his neck grow hot as the realization of what he just said sets in. He

thinks for a moment of trying to backtrack, but George doesn't say anything more, and the comment is (thankfully) glazed over. Dream glances hurriedly down at the counter, looking for something new to occupy his attention, something to keep him from saying such dumb things without thinking first. His eyes land on the bag of flour.

Dream listens as, on the other end of the line, a faucet is turned on. There's the sound of running water, a bit of rummaging, and then the telltale noise of George brushing his teeth, the tinny buzz of his electric toothbrush echoing through the speaker. Perhaps it should strike Dream as odd, how familiar that sound is to him, but after all these years it really doesn't. He opens another cabinet door, searching for salt.

They remain on the call in silence as George continues getting ready for bed. Dream can hear the faucet turn off, then back on after a moment, as George washes his face (Dream still remembers when he'd finally, *finally* bought an actual face wash and stopped using bar soap, a year or so ago. That had taken plenty of persuading on Dream's part). After that, George clicks the bathroom light off, and Dream listens as his footsteps make their way across the hall, to his bedroom. Dream's hand stills on the cabinet door, frozen for a moment as he listens to the soft sound of George tugging his hoodie over his head. Dream can hear it hit the ground, a muffled thump, and then he purposefully shuts his brain off.

"Ok," George mutters a minute later, flopping down onto his bed, sending the covers fluttering. "I'm in bed. Entertain me."

Dream laughs. "*Entertain you?* I thought you were sleeping."

"Well, I will eventually," George says, as if it's obvious. "But I'm not tired yet. So...entertain me."

"I'll have you know I'm very busy right now," Dream says, grinning as he finally spots the salt, tucked away on the top shelf. He grabs it, setting it down on the counter beside the flour.

"No you're not," George says, scoffing. Then, a bit hastily, "Are you? What are you doing?"

Dream presses his lips together, doing his best to keep his laughter at bay. Dream felt possessive sometimes, sure, but George did too, in his own way. The way he always wanted to know what Dream was doing, how he was spending his time. To some, it may have felt suffocating, but to Dream, it just felt comforting. He loved the idea of George, curled up on his side in bed, eyes focused intently on the phone in front of him, trying to conjure up an image of Dream's world in his own head.

"I'm baking bread," Dream admits, shutting the cabinet door. He's sure his mom had bought yeast too, ages back, when he and Sapnap had first moved into the house. Of course, he'd thought they'd have no use for it back then, but now (as usual) he was grateful for his mother's foresight.

"You know how to make bread?" George asks, clearly surprised.

"Yes," Dream grins, hoping he doesn't sound *too* proud of himself. "My mom taught me, when I was little. I haven't done it in a while, but I'm pretty good at it."

"Oh," George murmurs, and if Dream didn't know any better, he'd say he sounded a bit impressed. "How do you do it?"

"You wanna know how to make bread?" Dream asks, a bit taken aback. George had never expressed much interest in baking before, other than for content reasons.

"Sure," George mutters. "I mean, how hard can it be, if *you* can do it."

Dream chuckles. “Yeah, alright. Lemme track down the yeast.”

A few moments later, Dream has managed to assemble all his ingredients. He finds a woefully underused mixing bowl, and gets to work, letting his muscle memory carry him for the most part, explaining as he goes. George doesn’t say much, only occasionally interjecting when he has questions. Dream makes quick work of it, and soon the dough is set aside to rise.

“Now what?” George asks, hearing the pause in activity as Dream finishes washing his hands.

“We wait for it to rise,” Dream says. “It shouldn’t take too long.”

George groans. “That’s boring. I don’t wanna wait.”

“We have to,” Dream insists with a laugh. “Trust me, it’ll be worth it.”

“Fine,” George sighs, and Dream can hear him turn over to lie on his back, the sheets rustling slightly. Dream sinks down onto the kitchen floor, sitting with his back against the island in the center of the room, and sets his phone on the counter above him.

“I didn’t know your mom taught you how to bake,” George says after a moment, so quiet Dream almost has to strain to hear him.

“She did, a bit,” Dream says. “Bread was the main thing. Cookies too, but those are easy. We even made a pie once. That shit was *hard*.”

George laughs quietly. “No way. A pie? That’s epic.”

“It really wasn’t,” Dream insists. “Seriously. My mom did most of the work. I could barely figure out how to get the dough right.”

George hums. “Still. I wanna see that. You should make me a pie when I get there.”

“Yeah, we’ll see,” Dream chuckles, bringing his knees up to his chest. “You might have to settle for bread.”

There’s a brief pause as George readjusts himself in bed once more, tugging his blanket tighter around him by the sounds of it. *Blankets*, Dream notes to himself. *I should get him more blankets.*

“Did you and your mom ever do anything like that?” Dream asks after a moment.

“A bit, when I was younger,” George murmurs. “My dad too, sometimes. Round the holidays mostly. It’s been a while, though. And now that I’m leaving...”

George trails off, his words lilting slightly. It wasn’t often that George talked about his family, and when he did, it was never at any length. Dream was used to hearing small anecdotes about his parents and sister from his childhood, but George rarely kept him up to date on their day to day lives, despite their physical proximity to him. For the first time, it occurs to Dream that during all the chaos and excitement surrounding George’s visa and eventual move, he was also in the process of saying goodbye. And while he’d never brought it up directly, Dream could tell by the tone of his voice that those goodbyes were weighing heavy on his mind.

“I don’t know where I was going with that, sorry,” George finally speaks again, letting out a short, stilted laugh. “I was never any good at baking, anyway.”

Dream perks up, suddenly struck with an idea.

“You know what?” He begins. “When you’re here, I bet my mom can show us. How to make a pie, I mean. She can teach us both.”

“Really?” George asks, clearly taken aback by the offer.

“Oh my God, yeah, she’d love that,” Dream laughs, already picturing the chaos that was sure to unfold in his kitchen. “Trust me.”

“Ok,” George agrees, that same warmth returning to his voice, cast straight into Dream’s heart like a glowing ember. Immediately, Dream feels as if he could survive for days on that alone, the sound of George’s voice powering him from the inside like a furnace.

“Ok,” Dream echoes, grinning at nothing. It felt so surreal, sitting there on his kitchen floor, making plans with George that no longer existed only in the distant, unknowable future but just a few more days down the road. All of a sudden, his fears from earlier that day feel dwarfed by the fundamental, joyous truth of his situation.

For as long as they’d known each other, he and George had an ocean between them. In a few more days, they wouldn’t anymore, and Dream would be able to do all the stupid, ridiculous, wonderful things that he’d always wanted to do with him. No more waiting.

“I’m really happy you’re coming,” Dream says suddenly. “Have I said that yet?”

George lets out a delighted laugh. “You know, I don’t think you have.”

“Well, I am,” Dream says, his smile threatening to split his face right in two, it’s so wide. “Really, *really* happy.”

“I’m happy too,” George says, his voice dipping lower, softer. “Really, really happy.”

“You are?” Dream prompts, teasing.

“Yes!” George exclaims, exasperated and yet undeniably fond. “Don’t be dumb.”

“You’re *so* excited to meet me,” Dream drawls, that euphoric feeling returning to him, making his heart feel too big for his own body. “You’re, like, counting down the days on your calendar. Crossing them off with a pink, glittery pen.”

“Oh my *God*,” George groans. “Shut up. You’re the one who probably, I don’t know, printed out a picture of my face and tapped it to a pillow so you can cuddle with it at night.”

“*What?*” Dream demands, choking on his spit. “That’s so - *you’re* so-”

“It’s ok to admit, Dream. I know you get lonely,” George teases, clearly thrilled with the turn in their conversation. Dream smirks, letting his head fall back against the island behind him.

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” He challenges. “Think a lot about us being in bed together, is that it?”

Now, it’s George’s turn to splutter, which sends Dream bending forward in a fit of laughter.

“You are *so* annoying,” George insists once he’s regained the ability to speak. “Genuinely.”

“*Genuinely*,” Dream repeats, doing his best imitation of George’s accent. George lets out a frustrated sigh, and Dream really can’t stop smiling now, he’s so far gone.

“Is the bread ready yet?” George asks, clearly trying to change the subject. Dream allows him to, glancing up towards the bowl on the counter.

“Not yet,” he says. “Stay on with me until it is?”

“Yeah,” George agrees, stifling a yawn. “Of course.”

George, true to his word, stays on call as the bread finishing rising. Once it’s done, Dream transfers the dough into a small pan, before finally putting it in the oven to bake. It’s only then that Dream can hear George begin to drift off on the other end of the call, his breathing slowly evening out.

“Going to sleep?” Dream asks, being sure to keep his voice quiet.

“Hm,” George murmurs, his voice partially muffled by a pillow. “Don’t hang up.”

Dream shakes his head, smiling to himself. “I won’t.”

There’s a moment where Dream thinks George has finally fallen asleep in earnest, but then, he speaks again, his voice drowsy and low.

“Dream?” He asks, no louder than a whisper.

“Yeah?” Dream replies, taking his phone in his hands, all of a sudden feeling as if he must be very, very delicate with it.

“I am excited to meet you,” George says, open and honest and so sweet Dream feels like his heart might burst clean out of his chest. He stares down at his phone in awe, wondering how the hell he got so lucky to have someone like George on the other end of the line. It felt absurd, sometimes. Like he’d just woken up one day and a miracle had been presented to him.

“Me too, George,” Dream breathes. “You have no idea.”

“Hm,” George hums, sounding content. “I think about it all the time, you know.”

“You do?” Dream asks, his breath hitching. He isn’t even sure *why* that statement makes his heart stutter in the way it does - of course George thought about meeting him. But still, hearing it spoken aloud like that, in such hushed and gentle tones, makes it feel less like a statement of fact and more like a confession. Like there’s something deeper hidden behind George’s words, something he can’t decipher quite yet.

“Yeah,” George confirms, his mouth made loose and pliant with exhaustion. “These past few months. It’s all I could think about. Drove me crazy.”

Dream lets out a shocked laugh, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by it all. He moves to lean against the counter, his eyes searching his dimly lit kitchen until they land on the window above the kitchen sink, facing his backyard. His gaze remains there, trained on the inscrutable darkness outside.

“Me too,” he affirms. “Made me kinda crazy today.”

“It did?” George asks, sounding genuinely surprised.

“Yeah, I just...” Dream trails off, suddenly a bit embarrassed. “I want everything to be perfect, you know? For when you get here.”

George hums again. Dream really thinks he might drift off at any moment.

“You should really get some sleep,” Dream says gently. “We can talk in the morning. I can show you the bread.”

George lets out a small sound, pressing his face further into his pillow, and Dream has to reach a hand back and anchor himself, palm digging into the hard marble of the counter behind him. For some reason, he suddenly feels very unstable on his feet.

Another silence stretches out over the miles and miles between them. Dream stares out at his backyard, silent and dry, and listens to the sound of rain.

“You’re really good to me, Dream,” George murmurs. Dream feels all the breath leave him at once, rendering him hollow. For a moment, he can’t even speak.

“I am?” Dream asks, unsure of what path he’s walking down, what sort of answer he’s chasing after.

“Yes,” George confirms easily. Dream sucks in a breath sharply through his teeth. “Really good.”

Dream parts his lips silently. That hollow feeling in his chest is replaced with a swift surge of heat, so powerful he feels the need to raise his hand to his heart, tug at the fabric of his t-shirt, try to create some space, some room to *breathe*.

It wasn’t the first time George had made him feel like this - overheated, confused, suddenly unable to recognize the feelings emerging within him. Dream liked to imagine that he had a good sense of himself, but when George spoke to him like that, when he said things that made Dream’s brain turn into a mindless spiral of *more, more, more*, everything disappeared and all he was left with was the sinking realization that he didn’t know himself nearly as well as he thought he did.

Because here, standing in his kitchen, there was nothing Dream could do to obscure the pulsing, debilitating *want* that rested heavy in his gut. That’s what it always came back to with George, it seemed. How badly Dream *wanted*. How it overwhelmed everything else, until it was all that remained.

“I wanna be good to you,” Dream murmurs, barely recognizing his own voice when he speaks. It wasn’t even a sentiment he expected to express out loud, but for some reason, he couldn’t stop himself. “I want...”

He trails off. Maybe George had already fallen asleep. Maybe he’s speaking these words to nobody.

“I wanna take care of you,” he finishes, feeling vulnerable and a bit childish, always too earnest, never as coy as he intends to be.

There’s a beat of silence, and for a moment, Dream is certain that his words have fallen on deaf ears. Then, on the other end of the line, a small exhale -

“You do, Dream,” George assures him, his voice like water. Dream feels it *everywhere*. He reaches up and hastily presses the heel of his hand against his forehead, as if trying to physically force his thoughts back into place, away from whatever dangerous territory they seem to be veering into. “You take really good care of me.”

It’s almost too much now. Dream wonders why the fuck he’s standing in his kitchen, of all places, with its hard surfaces and high countertops, when all he wants to do is sink down, let his knees buckle, let himself give way-

“I wanna be good to you too, you know,” George speaks again, voice cast low into his chest. Dream has half a mind to tell him to stop, to try and regain some control over the conversation, but his better sense loses out almost immediately to his desire to hear more.

“Yeah?” He prompts, immediately taken aback by how breathy he sounds, how greedy. *Jesus*, he needs to get a grip.

“You’d let me, right?” George asks, his tone taking on a barely perceptible edge, words catching in his throat. “If I asked. You’d let me?”

“Of course, George,” Dream assures, unable to hide the earnestness in his words. There was no use trying to mask the truth, after all. Not when it was so obvious to both of them. “Whatever you want.”

Because it really was that simple. With George, it always had been. Whatever he wants. The problem was, Dream had never been quite sure of what that was. George could obscure his true desires with ease, far better than Dream ever could. He was cryptic, at times, even to the people who knew him best. But now...

Now Dream felt as though he had gained some new window inside, and it was impossible to turn away.

George exhales softly, pulling Dream out of his thoughts. There’s more movement on his end of the line - the slight tug of covers, the brief stretching of limbs. Dream latches onto every sound, no matter how insignificant, trying to memorize them all.

“Dream?” George asks, as if searching for confirmation that Dream is still there, a hand reaching out into the dark.

Dream shuts his eyes, trying to ground himself.

“Yes?” He replies.

There’s another beat of silence. It stretches on for what feels like an impossibly long amount of time, until Dream can barely stand it anymore, until he almost opens his mouth to -

“Goodnight,” George mutters. Dream sighs, only partly in relief, and lets his head fall back, suddenly feeling exhausted down to his bones.

“Goodnight, George,” he responds, doing his best to tamp down the persistent ache that has begun gnawing at him. “I’ll talk to you in the morning.”

This time, no response comes. Dream stands there, phone in hand, until he hears George’s breathing even out. With anyone else, Dream would’ve hung up, content to let their call drop, but with George -

Well, everything was different with George.

So, Dream stays on the line. He stays on the line, until his own thoughts begin to even out, until he’s able to start to rationalize their conversation in his own head, take away the parts that made his heart skip, that made his body feel as if it had been set ablaze. It takes far longer than he would like, because by the time he comes back down to earth, a slight burning scent has begun to flood the kitchen and Dream has to rush to rescue his bread, right before it tips into the territory of inedible.

When Dream falls into bed later that night, it's with his phone tucked next to his head, George still on the other end of the call. And in the morning, despite the light char coloring the outside, Dream snaps a picture of the loaf and texts it to him, a string of emojis accompanying the image, and no mention of their conversation from the night before.

It's not perfect, not by any means. But it'll do.

A Cup of Noodles

Despite his initial misgivings, the next few days pass for Dream with relative ease. It helps that, once he voices some of his fears to Sapnap, he heads off to Home Depot almost immediately, and returns an hour or so later with a couple paint buckets, a handful of brushes and a large, plastic tarp.

“Come on,” he says, unloading some of the supplies into Dream’s waiting arms. “George likes blue.”

That’s how they spend the next few hours. They don’t talk much - Sapnap puts on some music, bass reverberating through the speakers that he sets on the desk, and sings along as they go, making steady work of turning the sterile, white walls in George’s room into a soft, pale blue. *It already feels more like him*, Dream thinks to himself, standing back and admiring their work so far.

“THINK HE’LL LIKE IT?” Sapnap shouts over his shoulder, voice projected over the thumping beat. Dream winces, moving over to the desk and turning the music down. Sapnap frowns at him from his position over by the door, pausing his work. Somehow, he’s already got a massive blue paint streak on the side of his face.

“I think so,” Dream assures, glancing down at his own paint-splattered t-shirt. “You know, we probably could’ve hired someone to do this.”

“Yeah, but where’s the fun in that?” Sapnap says with a shrug. Dream grins at him, watching as his friend turns around and paints another wide streak across the wall, a few dribbles of blue cascading down towards the floor.

In the end, the room comes together nicely. Dream is left with a massive paint stain on his shirt, but he figures it’s worth it. He can always get a new one, and Sapnap was right. Doing it themselves was way more fun.

There are other ways he passes the time - catching up on editing, talking to his mom, going for walks around their neighborhood, long treks along the pavement that carry him down the street and back up again. At dusk, when all the lights in the homes surrounding theirs are turned on, it’s easy for Dream to pretend that he’s a child again, caught playing out past dark. The weather in Florida has smoothed into a temperate monotony, sunny days blending into tranquil evenings. It would be boring if it wasn’t so damn pleasant all the time. Despite how corny it sounds, Dream can’t help but feel as if his home state is putting its best foot forward. Preparing, just as he is, for George’s arrival.

Sometimes, during these walks, he puts his headphones in and stays on call with George, wandering the slow, curving streets as their conversation carries him well into the evening.

“You must look like such a creep right now,” George says, his mouth full of partially chewed food. “Just wandering the streets alone at night.”

Dream winces. “Swallow first. You’re disgusting.”

“You would want me to swallow,” George says drily. Dream almost stops dead in the middle of the sidewalk, he’s so surprised by the comment.

“*What?*” He demands, his voice pitched far higher than he would’ve liked. This sends George off into a fit of devilish laughter, which only subsides by the time Dream reaches the end of whatever street he’s found himself wandering down. He sighs, squinting up at the street sign over head.

“You are such an idiot.”

“I’m hilarious,” George mutters, mouth full once more. Dream rolls his eyes, but there’s no real venom behind it. At this point, he was more than used to George’s eating habits. In fact, he was used to *all* of George’s habits - how he slept, how he worked, what he made for breakfast in the morning. Maybe it was a bit odd, to be that well-acquainted with the day to day schedule of a person he’d never been in the same room with, but Dream couldn’t imagine his life operating in any other way. Where he was, there was George, tethered to the other end of a rope, pushing at him and tugging him closer and shaping the way he moved through life, even when he wasn’t around to see it.

Dream scuffs the toe of his sneaker against the pavement, glancing up towards the swiftly disappearing sun.

“How are your noodles?” He asks passively, still unsure of where he wanted his feet to take him next. George pauses, then deliberately swallows his bite before speaking again.

“What?” He asks.

“Your noodles,” Dream repeats. Absently, he pulls out his phone and checks the time, trying to determine exactly how many more moments of daylight he has left.

“How did you know I was eating noodles?” George asks. Dream pauses, looking up from his phone and staring into the middle distance, a slight frown on his face.

“Oh,” he murmurs. “Uh, you must’ve told me.”

“I didn’t,” George insists, laughing slightly. “Seriously, I didn’t.”

“Well, then I guess I just knew,” Dream replies hastily, already trying to gauge exactly how weird that behavior was. It was always tough, when it came to him and George. The metric of weirdness seemed to be constantly shifting.

“You just *knew*?” George echoes, clearly baffled. “What the hell, Dream!”

“What?” Dream demands. “I just...I heard the sound of the microwave, alright? And like, whatever you were eating, you had to blow on it a bit, before you actually ate it. And you *always* eat noodles too fast, you don’t stop to breathe, so the way you were chewing, I just...”

He trails off, suddenly painfully aware of just how insane he sounds. Did other people have such an encyclopedic knowledge of their friend’s eating patterns? Surely it couldn’t be just him.

There’s a moment of silence on the other end of the line. Then, he hears George let out a small snicker, which quickly escalates into a full blown laugh, high and breathy and clearly at Dream’s expense. Dream can feel his cheeks redden.

“Oh my God,” George exhales once he’s finally caught his breath. “You are *such* a weirdo.”

“I am not!” Dream insists. At that moment, an expensive looking car rounds the corner and passes Dream on its way up the street. Suddenly feeling very self-conscious, Dream turns on his heel and heads back towards home.

“You are,” George retorts, and it’s clear from his tone just how pleased with himself he is. “A weirdo and a creep. Maybe I should reconsider this whole moving in with you thing.”

“Oh *please*,” Dream snorts. “If anyone’s a weirdo here, it’s you.”

“How am *I* the weird one?” George demands.

“Uh, the soundboard, first of all,” Dream begins. George attempts to protest, but Dream ignores it and barrels on. “Seriously, you’re like, obsessed with cataloging everything I say.”

“*Obsessed?*” George echoes, incredulous. *He isn’t denying it*, Dream notes, unsure of what to do with that information.

“Not to mention the Snapchats-” He continues quickly, not wanting to lose momentum.

“What?”

“You screenshot my Snapchats!” Dream exclaims. “All the time! Because you just *love* having your own little collection of pictures-”

“You really wanna talk about who amongst us has the weirder collection of pictures? Really, Dream?”

Dream pauses, opening his mouth and then closing it abruptly.

“Ok-” He begins. “That’s not - I mean. Alright.”

There’s a moment of charged silence on the line. Then, like a dam bursting, the two of them are completely gone, laughter turning swiftly into gasps of air as Dream tries his best to stay upright on his feet. It’s a full minute before George can even speak again, and when he does, his voice is so raw, he can barely get a word out.

“See?” He gasps, struggling to speak. “You can’t even deny it!”

Dream brings a hand up and wipes at his damp eyes, his cheeks aching with laughter.

“Shut up,” he retorts weakly, which just sets George off again. “It’s not like the photos are...you know...”

“Are what?” George asks, excitement evident. Dream spares a desperate moment to curse himself for always ending up back in these type of situations.

“I just mean...they’re all normal pictures!” Dream insists. His steps slow as he arrives at his own street. Off down the road, he can see a few lights on in their home, including the one in Sappap’s room. He’ll have to check in and see if he’s streaming.

“As opposed to...?” George asks, not budging an inch. Dream feels his cheeks go hot.

“As opposed to...I don’t know!” Dream throws his hands up in exasperation before hastily lowering them, hoping none of his neighbors happened to be looking out their window at that exact moment. “None of them are *compromising*. Ok?”

“I see,” George says plainly. “I didn’t realize those were the type of photos that you wanted.”

“Jesus, George,” Dream laughs. “See, this is what I was talking about. You *are* a weirdo.”

“You’re the one who brought it up,” George says, and Dream can practically *hear* the smirk on his face, it’s so evident in his tone.

“We are *not* having this conversation. Not when you’re moving in with me in,” Dream pauses, his brain doing some quick math. “Two days.”

He stops short. *Two days*. George inhales, and Dream doesn’t think it’s his imagination that he sounds a bit shaky.

“Do you, uh-” Dream begins, his mind whirring, their previous thread of conversation completely forgotten. “Do you have everything packed? I know you’re shipping some stuff to us, but is there anything you forgot, maybe? I sent you the tickets but I can send them again if you-”

“Dream,” George interrupts, forceful but kind. “I’m good. I have everything.”

“Right,” Dream exhales. “Sorry. I just...”

“I get it,” George reassures. “Trust me. I think I’ve unpacked and repacked, like, five times now.”

Dream chuckles. He can imagine it so vividly in his head - George’s unkempt apartment, clothes scattered on every surface, suitcases stuffed haphazardly and then thrown open again. He grins, titling his face up towards the sky.

“How are you feeling?” He asks, watching a streetlamp flicker dully overhead, a collection of moths already beginning to appear within the halo it creates.

“What’d you mean?” George asks.

“Well...you’re moving to a different country in two days,” Dream explains, stuffing his hands deeper into the pockets of his hoodie as he continues his trek towards the house. “That’s a pretty big deal.”

“I guess,” George says, puzzling over the question. “I’m excited, obviously.”

Dream’s smile widens. He probably *does* look a bit weird, walking the streets alone, a huge grin plastered on his face. But at that moment, he can’t bring himself to care.

“Me too,” Dream says.

“I guess I was just...” George trails off just as Dream comes to the crest of his driveway. He stares up at the house, reluctant to move, not wanting to disturb whatever train of thought George is currently pursuing.

“Yeah?” He prompts gently after a moment.

“Do you think it’ll be any different?” George asks suddenly. Dream freezes, letting the question sink into the static between them. “When we’re together in person, I mean.”

Immediately, Dream’s mind goes to their conversation in the kitchen the other night. How George had sounded, all heat and tender words, leaving Dream feeling like a man possessed. It was dangerous, Dream had quickly realized, to be around George on nights like that, when the words exchanged between them felt less and less rational, and more driven by something Dream was still reluctant to name.

But then, of course, George had always been the wild card, the unnamable variable. He moved, and the world shifted around him. At least, Dream’s world did. Over and over and over again. And Dream always learned to adapt. In fact, he was happy to. Nothing fundamental ever had to change between them, not really.

"No," he answers honestly. "In a good way, though. We'll still be us just...closer together."

He hopes it's the answer George wanted to hear. Judging by the small chuckle George lets out, he's pretty sure it is.

"Way closer," George agrees. "You do shower right? If we're gonna be close I don't want you to stink."

"*What?*" Dream laughs, finally coming back to himself and heading down his driveway towards the house. He cuts across the front yard, fumbling for his key in his hoodie pocket. "Why do you automatically assume I'll stink?"

"Not like you've given me much to go off of," George mutters. "You *could* stink, for all I know."

"I don't!" Dream insists, unlocking his front door and finally slipping inside.

"Alright," George concedes. "What do you smell like, then?"

Dream pauses mid-search for the light switch, his hand stilling on the wall.

"Uh," he says. "You...wanna know what I smell like?"

"Sure," George says, as if it's the most normal desire in the world. "Otherwise I'm just gonna assume it's, like, shoes or something."

"I don't smell like shoes," Dream says, forcing himself to move and actually turn the light on. The moment he does, he spots Patches, down near the end of the hall, where her food bowl rests by the entrance to the kitchen. He grins, coming to kneel beside her. "I smell like...huh. I guess I don't really know."

"So, shoes," George repeats, clearly baiting him. Dream rolls his eyes, giving Patches a few scratches on the head. She purrs contentedly, butting her head up against his hand.

"Fine, I smell like soap," he says. "Lavender soap, I guess, since that's the kind my mom bought. And...I don't know what else. Cucumber?"

"Cucumber?" George echoes, sounding surprised.

"Yeah," Dream shrugs, looping an arm around Patches and scooping her up easily into his arms. "I have cucumber deodorant. Is that weird?"

"No," George says. "Just...unexpected. I thought you'd wanna smell like musk or something."

"*Musk?*" Dream demands, laughter shaking his chest.

"Yes!" George insists. "I don't know!"

"Well, I don't," Dream says, scratching at Patches's fur absentmindedly. "Now that you know what I smell like are there any other weird, invasive questions you wanna get out of the way before you arrive?"

"You're an idiot," George says by way of reply. Dream grins, heading up the stairs at the end of the hall. One flight up, and he can hear Sapnap in his room, shouting into his mic about something Dream can't make out.

"You hear that?" He asks, pausing for a moment. There's silence on the other end as George

strains to listen.

“Oh my God,” George chuckles, as Sapnap lets out another scream in the background. “Please tell me my room isn’t anywhere near his.”

“Nah, you’re safe,” Dream assures, heading up the next flight of stairs. “My office and his room are on the second floor, you and me are the next floor up.”

“Huh,” George muses. “Just wanted to be as close to me as possible?”

“Shut up,” Dream shoots back automatically. The truth of the matter was, when he and Sapnap had picked out their rooms, it was just by chance that Dream had ended up on the floor with the other bedroom. But now that he’s standing there in the hall, in the small space between his room and the room George will soon be occupying, he can’t help but become hyper-aware of their proximity. They really *are* gonna be close.

“Is it a nice room?” George asks, and Dream is surprised by the change in his tone. He sounds a bit embarrassed to be asking, which doesn’t make any sense at all. It’s *his* room, after all.

“Yeah, it’s nice,” Dream assures. “Do you wanna see it?”

George had seen glimpses of the inside of their house before, mostly on FaceTime with Sapnap, but Dream can’t recall ever actually showing him inside the room he’d be moving into. It was a bit silly, Dream realizes in hindsight. He probably should’ve sent photos much earlier, but George had never asked.

“I guess,” George says, clearly still reluctant. Dream rolls his eyes, a fond smile unconsciously rising on his lips. George got like this sometimes - bashful about the oddest things, as if Dream was suddenly gonna turn around and berate him for having normal, human emotions. When they’d first become friends, it had confused the shit out of him. Now, Dream had learned to roll with it as best he could, finding ways to reassure George without coming right out and confronting him about it. What Dream wanted to do was take George by the shoulders (metaphorically, of course. At least while they were still separated by an ocean) and tell him that he could do pretty much anything, make any request, and Dream would say yes, not because he felt like he *had* to, but because he wanted to.

What he does instead is gently push the door to George’s future room open, still holding Patches against his chest, and flick the light switch on with his free hand. Dream’s eyes scan the light blue walls, the desk with a half-built PC resting atop it, the bed covered in a soft white duvet. The room is almost eerily still, an empty space waiting to be filled. Dream can feel anticipation rise in his chest, making his heart lurch expectantly. Two more days, and it wouldn’t be empty anymore.

He tugs his phone out of his pocket, and takes a quick video, sweeping the camera across the whole room. Then, he sends it to George.

“Check your phone,” he says the moment the message goes through. There’s some shuffling on the other end of the line as George picks up his phone, and then another beat of silence as George plays the video. Dream bites back a smile.

“It’s...” George trails off, his voice quiet. Patches wiggles slightly in his arms, and Dream readjusts his position, giving her a few neck scratches as he does.

“Any thoughts? Requests for improvements?” Dream asks, only half-joking. He really *does* wanna know what George thinks. Already, he’s begun overanalyzing things. He steps further into the

room, squinting up at the light overhead. Should he get a new one? Was this one too bright? Too dim?

“No,” George says plainly, interrupting Dream’s thoughts. “No, it’s perfect.”

Dream stops short, surprised by the comment. Patches lets out a soft, discontented mewl as Dream’s hand stills.

“Really?” He asks, unable to mask his surprise.

“Yes,” George says, and then lets out a small, delighted laugh. “Really, Dream. It’s great.”

“Alright,” Dream says, a grin spreading across his face. “Ok. Good.”

“Good,” George echoes, and Dream can tell he’s smiling too.

“Uh, anything else you wanna see?” Dream offers, suddenly wanting to show George more, anything to keep him talking like this as much as he can. “I mean, you’ll be here in a couple days anyway, but I just thought-”

“There is one thing,” George interrupts suddenly, his words rushed, as if he’s trying to get them all out in one breath.

“What?” Dream asks. No response comes, and a frown settles on Dream’s face as the silence grows between him. Then, all at once, the realization hits. “*Oh.*”

“Yeah,” George murmurs, that same reluctance coloring his tone.

“You wanna see me,” Dream states, perhaps a bit redundantly. George doesn’t respond, but his silence is a clear confirmation. “You’ve seen me before, though.”

Sort of. The number of pictures George had seen of him could be counted on one hand. There was an old yearbook photo, once. Some Snapchats that showed only parts of his face; his eye, his jaw, a very zoomed-in picture of just his eyebrow. Black screens were far more common, or pictures of Dream’s surroundings. It was rare that he turned the camera on himself, and when he did, he never showed George everything.

It’s not like he hadn’t thought about it before, though. George used to ask more frequently, back when they were first becoming close, and there were plenty of times where Dream almost went for it, before he’d inevitably back down at the last second. As time wore on, the topic was dropped, and George seemed to be content with whatever Dream chose to give him.

But that was a long time ago. And now, when Dream thinks about the prospect of George seeing his face, seeing *him*, that same familiar spike of dread doesn’t appear. In fact, all of a sudden, he feels a bit impatient. They’d spent so much time waiting, did they really have to keep delaying it further?

“I mean, I have a rough idea of what you look like,” George explains hurriedly, his tone still flighty, as if he might decide to back away at any moment, turn on his heel and retreat. “But that’s very different from *knowing*. Like, what if I don’t recognize you at first? I could end up running into the arms of a total stranger at the airport who just sort of looks like you.”

“You were planning on running into my arms?” Dream asks, unable to resist. George lets out a small huff, but where Dream expects a retort, none comes. A heavy silence falls between them, and it’s only then that Dream understands that the ball has been placed firmly in his court. *He’s only*

gonna ask once, he realizes. Everything else is up to me.

George had never been shy about trying to get what he wanted, particularly when it came to Dream. It wasn't exactly like Dream had the best track record of saying no, and besides, he genuinely liked doing stuff for people. It felt good, helping where he was needed, taking what he had and trying to redistribute it as best he could. With George he just...did it more. That was all. This time, however, it feels different. Because here was George giving him a clear out, a way to dodge the conversation and let it drop, if he wanted to. No push and pull, no final pleas.

If anything, that only made Dream realize just how important it was to him. How badly George actually wanted it. If it meant any less to him, he would've been able to talk about it more.

"Alright," Dream agrees. The silence persists, for another breath, and then -

"*What?*" George exclaims, so loud it almost peaks his mic.

Dream lets out a surprised laugh. It wasn't often that he got George's composure to drop like that, get him truly and honestly flustered, but when he did, it felt *great*.

"I'm saying yes!" He says, finally heading out of George's room and moving across the hall towards his own. "Gimme a second."

"I was just - Dream, wait," George begins, clearly trying to backtrack. "I wasn't being serious, come on. I was just fucking with you."

Dream rolls his eyes. It was to be expected, this sudden retreat into forced indifference, but he ignores it, choosing instead to turn on the light in his room and head over to the full length mirror hung up on his closet door.

"Well, I *am* being serious," he says. "You're gonna see me in two days, anyway. What's one photo before then?"

"But..." George trails off, trepidation evident. "Don't you just wanna wait?"

Dream pauses, phone in hand. Patches is still nestled comfortably in the crook of his arm, held tight against his chest, blissfully unaware of what's about to occur. He glances down at her, a small smile on his face, then meets his own eyes in the mirror's reflection.

There's nothing remarkable about today. He looks just as he always does, if a bit more tired. His hair is longer than he's used to, curling up slightly at the base of his neck, and if it were up to him, he'd be wearing something a little nicer, something other than the hoodie and joggers he's currently got on. Dream squares his shoulders, trying to imagine how it would feel to see himself, *properly* see himself, for the first time. Would George notice the slight bags under his eyes? If he smiled, would he spot the odd shape of his canines, the way they appeared sharper than normal, or the small gap between his front teeth? Suddenly, every small aspect of his appearance seemed amplified, brought into starker relief at the prospect of somebody else laying eyes on them.

Not just somebody, a small voice in his head reminds him. *George*.

Patches chooses that moment to wiggle free from his grasp, jumping deftly to the ground and trotting over towards his bed. Dream's eyes search his own face, trying to draw some sort of conclusion from his unchanging reflection. There are no answers to be found, of course. Just himself.

But for some unknowable reason, in that moment, it's enough.

“No,” he says definitively. “I’m tired of waiting.”

Before he can doubt himself, he brings the phone up and snaps a picture. He spares a few seconds to look down at it, trying to ignore the slight tremor in his hand. There’s a small smile on his face, crinkling his eyes at the edges, and even in the dim light of the room, his freckles stand out in stark contrast against his skin. He’s got some stubble tracing the curvature of his jaw as well, the result of him not having shaved for a couple of days. Dream exhales, his eyes scanning his own face. On the other end of the line, George remains uncharacteristically silent.

There’s a million things he could pick apart in the photo. For one, frantic moment Dream’s finger hovers over the X in the top corner, his mind whirring.

Then, he shifts his thumb down, and hits send.

“Check your phone,” he says.

“Dream,” George murmurs, testing.

“George,” Dream says, more confident this time. “Check your phone.”

It feels like an eternity before Dream finally hears the sound of George’s phone being retrieved from the desk once more. Another beat, and George lets out a soft breath. He’s seen it now. Dream stands there, arms hanging limp by his side, and waits.

“So?” He prompts after another moment of agonizing silence. He isn’t even sure what response he’s looking for, exactly. The whole situation still felt too surreal to conceptualize properly. He didn’t regret it, not at all, but he also didn’t want George to feel as if he was under some sort of obligation to respond in a certain way. There were no expectations on his part, and besides, it’s not like George would say anything that would -

“Oh my God,” George finally speaks, his voice colored with surprise, as if he can hardly believe what he’s seeing. “Dream, you’re *really* good looking.”

Dream freezes. The words, spoken so plainly and with no trace of shame, hit him like a punch. He feels struck dumb. Whatever he was expecting, it certainly wasn’t *that*.

“What?” He asks, mind reeling.

“Yeah,” George continues. Dream searches his tone for any hint of sarcasm, any hidden punch line, but none comes. “I mean, I guess I sort of knew that already but...I don’t know. You have a really nice face.”

Dream, in a moment he will almost certainly be embarrassed about later, is suddenly hit with the overwhelming need to sit down. He moves to his bed, letting his knees give out under him. From her perch near his pillows, Patches blinks at him curiously.

“Uh,” he says, smartly.

It wasn’t like Dream had never been complimented before. But for some reason, when George does it, it feels entirely new. No one’s words had ever had *this* effect on him. All of a sudden, he’s desperate to know exactly what George thinks is so nice about his face - could he ask for specifics? No, that’d be insane. He should just thank him and move on, let the topic drop before -

“It’s funny,” George continues, completely unaware of Dream’s increasingly unhinged internal monologue. “I had this image of you in my head, and it was kind of accurate, but I guess I never put

all the parts together in the right way.”

“What do you mean?” Dream asks, his mouth gone very dry.

“I just...” George trails off, laughing slightly. “I didn’t expect you to be so pretty. Is that weird?”

Dream lets out a shaky laugh, the absurdity of the situation hitting him in full force. A few moments ago, George had never even seen a full picture of Dream’s face, at least not a recent one. Now he was sitting here calling him *pretty*. It was all a bit ridiculous.

“Pretty?” He repeats, incredulous.

“Yes!” George insists. Dream runs a hand through his hair, a smile blooming across his face.

“That is...” He begins, unsure of what to say.

What was it, exactly? Nice? Sure, but that felt like such a weak word to use. Surprising? Yeah, obviously. George wasn’t exactly known for dishing out compliments, not unless he was prompted, so never in a million years did Dream expect him to come right out and call him *pretty*. He doesn’t think he’s ever heard George call *anyone* that before.

At that realization, Dream feels a sharp burst of pride in his chest. George was notoriously blunt, sometimes to the point of tactlessness, but it also meant that he was one of the few people Dream could trust completely. He wasn’t gonna bullshit him, especially not now, when it was just the two of them.

“You think I’m pretty,” Dream states, grinning at nothing. George scoffs.

“Yes, Dream,” he says. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

It was too late. Dream was far past that point already. How could he not be? This was *George* saying these words to him.

“Any other adjectives you wanna pull out?” He prompts, grinning. “Gorgeous, maybe? Or hot? I’d take ‘incredibly handsome’ too. Or you can just call me good looking again.”

“Oh my god,” George groans. “You are insufferable. Honestly, I don’t know why I even said anything.”

“But you did,” Dream reminds him, unable to wipe the smile off his face. “You think I’m pretty.”

“How many times are you gonna repeat that?” George asks, and Dream can practically hear him roll his eyes.

“Hmm, as many times as I want,” Dream decides, flopping down onto his back and staring up at his ceiling. “Could you tweet it, actually? I wanna print it out and get it framed.”

“I’m hanging up now,” George says. “Thanks for the photo, dumbass.”

“George, wait,” Dream says hurriedly. There’s a pause on the other end of the line. “That was... really nice to hear. Thank you.”

For a moment, George doesn’t speak. Dream takes a breath, holds it. Waits.

“You just like it when I compliment you,” George finally says, his voice softer, more subdued.

"I do," Dream admits easily. That was no secret.

"Hm," George murmurs. "And what if I did call you gorgeous? Or *hot*?"

Dream exhales shakily. Any control he had gained over their conversation was quickly disappearing at the sound of those words coming out of George's mouth. He shifts slightly in bed, suddenly incredibly aware of his own body.

"Do you think those things about me?" He asks, bringing up a hand and resting it flat against the plane of his stomach.

George hums to himself, a nothing answer. For a moment, Dream thinks that will be the end of their conversation, and he'll be left feeling as confused as ever. Then -

"Maybe I wanna see more of you," George says, his tone inscrutable. Dream's lips part. He stares up at his ceiling, his thoughts racing, and tries to keep his breathing steady.

Whatever he thinks George is implying, he's obviously got it wrong. It's as simple as that. George is teasing him, clearly. That's all.

"You will," Dream reminds him, keeping his tone light. "In two days. Remember?"

"Two days is a long time," George says, another evasive response. Dream shuts his eyes, suddenly needing to block out everything what wasn't the sound of George's voice against his ear.

"It's really not," he says, putting a great deal of effort into keeping his voice even. "You'll be on a plane before you know it. And then, you'll be here."

There's silence from George's end of the call again, and then, almost too quiet to be heard, the light tapping of fingers against glass. His phone screen, Dream realizes.

"You're still looking at the photo, aren't you?" Dream asks, already knowing the answer.

"Maybe," George says, in a way that Dream is certain means *yes*.

"And what are you thinking?" Dream prompts, feeling as if he's holding his hand out over a flame, waiting for the fire to catch. He presses his palm into his bedspread, trying to dispel the sensation of phantom heat.

"That two days is a *really* long time," George murmurs.

Dream's hand clenches against his stomach, bunching up the fabric of his hoodie. More and more frequently, he was finding himself in this position; rent asunder by George's words, control slipping swiftly out of his grasp. He screws his eyes shut tighter, spots of light dancing beneath his eyelids, and tries to think about things other than how badly he wished the space between them could be erased *now*. It's futile, of course.

Because after hearing George's voice, after hearing him say those words, two days suddenly felt like an impossibly long stretch of time. And apparently, his mind wasn't the only part of him that felt that way. That same ache was returning to him now, and this time, it was impossible for Dream to obscure its true meaning. He wanted George to keep talking, keep saying sweet things in his ear. He imagined it, how it would be feel to have George there next to him, telling Dream how gorgeous he was, how *pretty*, how he was good, how he wanted him to -

Dream's eyes snap open.

“I need to take a shower,” he says suddenly. “I just went for a walk, and I’m all sweaty, so...”

He trails off, face enflamed, unsure of why he felt the need to include that particular detail.

“Oh,” George says. “Right. Uh, so you’re...”

“Gonna go,” Dream finishes. “I’ll talk to you later though. If you want.”

“Sure,” George agrees easily, seemingly undisturbed by the abrupt end to their conversation. Dream sits up, painfully aware of the sudden tightness of his joggers.

“Bye, George,” Dream mutters, near desperate to end the call at this point. He reaches for his phone, discarded somewhere on his bed.

“Wait, Dream,” George says, stopping Dream instantly with his words. “Thank you for the photo. Really.”

Dream stares down at his phone, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

“You’re welcome,” he says, wishing desperately at that moment that he could see George’s face. There’s another beat of silence, and then -

“Goodbye, Dream.”

The line between them goes dead.

One hour and a very, *very* cold shower later, Dream returns to his room to see a Snapchat from George waiting for him. With one hand still toweling off his dripping hair, he grabs his phone and he opens it. He’s greeted with a picture of the now empty Cup of Noodles, sitting on George’s desk, unusually clean as a result of everything on it having been packed away. Over the photo is a caption -

they were alright, it reads.

Dream grins, and sends off a quick message in response, asking George to hop on Discord again. They’ve already talked for about five hours that day, but surely a few more couldn’t hurt.

The call stretches long into the night, and by the end of it, the two days still separating them start to feel a bit more manageable again.

A Grilled Cheese

Years and years ago, back when Dream was still in middle school, he used to fall asleep in gardens.

Well, one garden in particular. The one his parents maintained in the backyard of their home, so lovingly looked after you'd think it was another child. It wasn't a large plot of land, but what it lacked in size it more than made up for in spectacle: great, crowning sunflowers, pockets of azaleas and daisies, morning glories that climbed their way up fenceposts towards the light. On early mornings, when Dream's eyes were heavy with exhaustion and the prospect of school felt too daunting to contend with, he'd sneak back among the plants and doze off until, hours later, the high noon sun would inevitably stir him from his sleep. Lying there, the dark earth cool on his back, Dream would stretch his hand out and gaze upward between the gaps in the trees, the sunlight filtering in through the branches, so bright and warm it almost hurt to look at. Even as a child, Dream was struck with the surreal feeling that life would never feel like this again: so wild and precious, a thing made all the more impossible to hold onto by its beauty.

But if Dream was used to one thing by now, it was being surprised.

Because all these years later, Dream finds himself struck with that same feeling again, his eyes squinting against the overwhelming light that floods his field of vision. A cool breeze blows on his face, but it does little to dispel the all-encompassing warmth that surrounds him. It fills up every crevice of his body, until he's sure his face is flushed with it.

Then, from the passenger seat, George turns to meet his gaze.

It feels like a memory, Dream realizes. Despite the newness of it all - he swears he's been here before.

"Dream," George says, the sun so bright behind him it almost looks as if he's been lit up from the inside. A small smile crosses his lips, teasing and soft. "The light is green, dumbass."

Dream snaps back to himself, head swiveling around to face forward once more. His foot hits the gas and the car jolts forward. Beside him, George reaches a hand out and grips the dashboard, a surprised laugh bubbling past his lips. In the review mirror, Dream meets Sapnap's eyes.

"Sorry," he says to the car. Behind him, Sapnap raises his eyebrows.

"Distracted?" He asks, smirking slightly. Dream shakes his head, deliberately ignoring the disgruntled horn that sounds from the car behind them.

"No," he insists. Even as he says it, he can feel his eyes start to drift towards the passenger seat once more. He tightens his grip on the steering wheel, forcing his focus to return to the road ahead.

A mere fifteen minutes ago, Dream had been a bundle of nerves, pacing back and forth on the pavement outside the Orlando International Airport. He knew, somewhere inside, that Sapnap had already tracked down George, and was in the process of retrieving his luggage and bringing him back to the car. Dream had *wanted* to go inside with him, but the three of them had all agreed that was a stupid idea. It wasn't entirely impossible that they'd get recognized, and none of them wanted a blurry picture of Dream's face showing up on Twitter that same afternoon.

So, unwilling to miss the airport meeting altogether, Dream had elected to wait by the car. He'd parked at the very end of the pickup zone, far away from any taxis and prying eyes. Despite the fact that not a single soul passing by would have any idea who he was, he still felt entirely exposed.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd been around so many people, and every eye that accidentally caught his own sent a sharp chill of anxiety racing down his spine. He longed for the days, before his YouTube career had taken off in earnest, where he could strike up a conversation with a random stranger, return smiles on the street without worrying that somehow, despite the impossibility of it all, the other person would recognize him.

Of course, a day would arrive in the not too distant future where he would be able to do that again. There were times in the past where the prospect of his impending face reveal left him feeling daunted, but now, after all the time he'd spent waiting, Dream was more excited than anything else. Not only would he be able to go out in the world again, do all the things he'd missed so dearly in the nearly two years he'd spend apart from it, but he'd be able to do it with his best friends. Nothing could dissuade him from making that a reality.

At that moment, a text from Sapnap appears on his phone, abruptly pulling him out of his thoughts.

on our way out, it reads.

Suddenly, everything else around him is reduced to white noise and static. The roar of planes overhead, the chatter of passing families, the idle hum of cars lined up in front of his own - it all fades into nothingness. Dream straightens up, eyes glued to the door where he knows they'll be exiting from, and for the last time, he waits for George.

It doesn't take long for them to make it outside. Dream spots Sapnap first, a black duffel bag slung over his shoulder, head thrown back in laughter as he makes his way towards the car. Then, as they emerge from the crowd, his eyes find George.

He's got his mask tugged down around his chin, so when he smiles, Dream sees it light up his entire face. Even from a distance, Dream notices every detail: the way his eyes crinkle around the edges, the flash of his teeth, his mouth forming words that Dream can't quite hear, the rosy flush that rests on his cheeks. One hand is wheeling a large suitcase behind him, and he's wearing a sweater Dream recognizes, the soft cream crewneck, the one Dream always thought made his eyes look nice. Immediately, Dream is struck with how familiar it all feels. This is George, as he's always known him, and though it doesn't make sense for him to say about a person he's never even met before, Dream *missed* him. He really fucking missed him.

He resists the urge to do something truly stupid, like shout his name or start waving his arms above his head, but just as Dream is debating the best way forward, George finally meets his eyes. He stops short, right in the middle of the walkway, and just stares at him, so open and unashamed it almost makes Dream blush. Sapnap keeps walking for a few steps before finally realizing George isn't beside him anymore. He stops and turns around, looking at George and then at Dream, who's been rendered completely immobile by the weight of George's eyes on him.

Then, because Dream could never stand still for long, he slowly raises a hand and waves.

George's face splits into perhaps the largest smile Dream's ever seen. He abandons his suitcase altogether, rushing up to meet him, and Dream takes a couple large strides forward, closing the distance between them. George doesn't lose momentum, so when Dream opens his arms, he practically collides with his chest, sending them both stumbling backwards. Trying to keep them steady, Dream does the best thing he can think of and picks George up off the ground, his arms held fast around his waist. George lets out a surprised yelp, arms coming up to wrap around Dream's neck, before he dissolves into a fit of laughter, his chest shaking. Dream stands there, too overwhelmed to speak. Still holding George in his arms, he brings a hand up and presses it firmly against George's back, fingers bunching up in the fabric of his sweater. He's warm, and light, and his hair is tickling Dream's nose slightly, and he smells like laundry and rain, the best scents in the

world, and Dream loves him so much, he feels like he might actually die.

George exhales, breath warm against Dream's neck.

"Hi," he says, his voice impossibly clear, no longer muddled by bad internet connections or shoddy microphones.

"Hey," Dream replies, wondering how the fuck he's ever supposed to let this moment go.

He allows it to linger for a little while longer, trying to memorize the feeling of George's face tucked in the crook of his shoulder, before he finally sets him down, giving him space to breath. He takes a small step back, attempting to steady his own heartbeat as best he can, eyes never leaving George's face. It almost doesn't feel real. He half considers asking George to pinch him.

Then, a small frown crosses George's features.

"You crushed my sandwich," he says. Dream stares at him, baffled.

"*What?*"

George reaches into the pocket of his sweatpants and produces a very squished looking ham sandwich that he'd clearly bought at some point during his trip. Dream stares at it, dumbfounded, then looks at George once more.

"Oh," Dream murmurs. "I crushed your sandwich."

George looks up at him, his eyes sparkling (Dream didn't even know eyes could actually *do* that in real life) and Dream almost wants to laugh, it's so absurd how happy he is. He opens his mouth, trying to think of something to say, but comes up empty. Nothing he could say would even come close to capturing how he feels. So, he just stares at George, trying to drink in every detail of the moment, a dopey grin on his face. George cocks his head to the side slightly, a knowing smile on his lips, as if to say *Yeah, me too*.

Then, from beside him, Sapnap swings an arm around Dream's neck and pulls him down. He grabs George as well, crushing them all together, into what Dream assumes is meant to be an attempt at a group hug. He laughs, wrapping an arm around Sapnap and doing the best he can to bring them all together. George's arm finds its way around Dream's waist, pulling his fast against his side, and for someone who claimed he wasn't a hugger, George seems awfully fond of keeping him as close as physically possible.

"We must look so strange right now," George says, his forehead practically touching Sapnap's.

"Shut up," Sapnap insists. "Enjoy the moment, pussy."

George laughs again, bright and warm, and Dream can feel a sting begin to emerge behind his eyes. He ducks his head down hastily, a bit embarrassed.

"Oh my God," George murmurs, his laughter subsiding. "Dream, are you crying?"

"No," Dream lies. Sapnap pats him firmly on the back.

"Come on, dude. Get a grip," he says, but when Dream looks over to meet his eyes, he realizes they're a bit damp too. He smiles, vision going blurry, and turns to look at George once more.

"I'm just really happy you're here," he says honestly. George stares at him for a moment, dark eyes

gone wide, before he hastily looks away, blinking rapidly.

“Me too,” he says, and his voice sounds a bit thicker than before, a bit more strained. Dream almost mentions it, but thinks better of it, choosing instead to loop his other arm around George’s shoulder and tug him in even closer. It’s a bit intoxicating, how good it feels having George pressed up against him like that. Already, Dream is seized with the childlike impulse to never let him go, to simply keep one hand on George at all times, now that he’s realized how much he likes having him there, close to him.

George sniffs sharply, clearly trying to compose himself, and Sapnap (always more observant than Dream gives him credit for) does the kind thing and turns his attention away, departing from the hug and moving to grab the suitcase George abandoned a few feet back. Dream remains there for a moment longer, arm still wrapped firmly around George’s shoulder. Then, just as he’s about to pull away, George turns to face him once more. Dream looks down at him, surprised.

“How far is the drive home?” He asks. It’s such a simple question, one George clearly doesn’t think twice about asking, but the moment Dream hears the word *home* leave his lips, it sends him floating. All the lead up, all the anticipation, and Dream finally found himself here, with the person he’d been waiting for by his side. Happy didn’t even begin to describe it.

“Not far,” he says, and smiles.

Of course, the drive probably would’ve gone a bit quicker if Dream didn’t keep finding himself so easily distracted. It wasn’t his fault, really. It was a combination of factors, all conspiring against him and their smooth journey back to the house.

Namely, it was the way George looked in the sun.

Dream bites the inside of his cheek, forcing his attention to remain focused on the road in front of him. They’ve already had a couple of close calls, and everytime Dream hits the breaks at the last minute or rushes to get moving after he failed to realize that the light has turned green, Sapnap only grows more and more amused in the backseat. At this point, Dream is pretty sure he’s actively stifling laughter.

George, for his part, seems completely oblivious to Dream’s inner turmoil. He has his face tilted towards the window, eyes closed, seemingly content to simply bask in the warmth the sun is providing. He’s clearly tired after his flight, the bags under his eyes looking more pronounced than usual, but it has the (incredibly frustrating) effect of actually making him look *more* beautiful. At one point, when it’s actually safe to spare a glance over at him, Dream finds himself trying to map out every detail of his face in the short time he’s provided; the small constellation of freckles on his cheek, the way his dark eyelashes stand out against his pale skin, the light dusting of stubble on his jaw.

It’s then that Dream comes to the startling realization that this is just his life now. George isn’t going anywhere. He has all the time in the world to look. The rational part of his brain reminds him that this should probably make him a bit less greedy, but then George adjusts his posture slightly, eyes fluttering open, and the last thing in the world Dream wants to do is look away.

He does though. He figures getting in a car accident would be a pretty shitty way to welcome George to America.

“Are we almost there?” George asks, tilting his face to look over at Dream. Dream nods, internally

patting himself on the back for the frankly God-like amount of self-discipline he is currently exhibiting.

“Yeah,” he says, deliberately not turning to meet his gaze. “Shouldn’t be too much longer, if traffic stays good.”

“Dream?” George asks. At the sound of his name being spoken aloud, Dream’s gaze immediately returns to George without a second thought. So much for self-discipline.

“Yes?” He replies, a bit embarrassed by the eagerness of his own voice. A slow smile grows across George’s lips, in a way Dream can only think to describe as cat-like.

“Eyes on the road,” George says, and turns away once more. Dream stares at him, mouth agape. *That bastard.*

Sapnap chooses that moment to crowd into the space between them, leaning forward from the backseat and snatching up the aux cable. Dream’s eyes return to the road once more, as a heavy bass line begins reverberating through the car.

“No way!” George exclaims, turning around in his seat to look at Sapnap. “I’ve heard this song before, on TikTok.”

“You get all your music from TikTok,” Sapnap points out.

“So?” George demands. “You get all your Valorant plays from TikTok.”

Dream lets out a surprised laugh, which earns him a firm whack on the back of his head from Sapnap.

“Hey!” He protests, bending forward in his seat, away from his attacker’s reach. “No messing with the driver, I’m holding your lives in my hands right now.”

“Yeah, well maybe I’d feel safer if you could keep your eyes forward for more than two seconds,” Sapnap says, leaning back, a triumphant grin on his face. Dream catches his eye in the rearview mirror and glares. Beside him, George does a very poor job of hiding his smile in his hand.

There’s peace in the car, for a little while, as Sapnap continues to fiddle with the music selection, singing along loudly to every new track that comes on. A light breeze wafts through Dream’s hair from the open window beside him, and he cards a hand through the locks around his forehead, trying to push them away from his eyes. Despite its unruliness, he’s not ready to cut it quite yet. He always liked the way his hair looked when it was a bit longer.

Then, as the car slows to a stop at another red light, he becomes acutely aware of a pair of eyes on him. He clears his throat, hands flexing on the steering wheel.

George is *staring* at him. Like, really staring. Dream squirms slightly in his seat, thrown off by the sudden flip in their dynamic. Over their years of friendship, he’d become so used to staring at George that he’d never really considered what the reverse would feel like. But now, George’s eyes are pinned on him like...well, Dream wasn’t exactly sure what it was like. The sensation was so new, so startling, it was impossible to put words to it yet.

The light stays red, long enough for Dream turn to the side and finally meet George’s gaze.

George doesn’t look away. He doesn’t even flinch. He simply remains there, eyes trained on Dream, lips pressed together in a soft smile. Immediately, Dream’s mind returns to their

conversation on the phone the other night, after Dream had sent George that photo. He swallows drily.

Two days is a really long time.

Now, those words feel as if they had been spoken a lifetime ago. Because here was George, no longer a voice on the other end of a call but real and solid, sitting less than a foot away from Dream. He thinks about the other things George had said that night. The part of about him having a nice face. How he'd wanted to see more of him.

Pretty, George had called him. Was that what he was thinking right now, as he watched Dream from the passenger seat? That Dream looked pretty like this?

"What are you doing?" Dream ventures to ask, feeling emboldened.

"Looking at you," George says simply. "You're a lot to get used to."

"I'm 'a lot'?" Dream scoffs, the words going straight to his head. He liked the idea that he surprised George, even after he'd given him a clearer picture of what he looked like. Maybe George had spent a long time wondering, and the picture Dream had sent had only made him *more* curious. Maybe he thought Dream looked better in person. The thought sets off a pleasant spark of heat, low in Dream's stomach.

"Mhm," George nods, still not looking away. George could be bashful, sure (Dream had always loved how easy it was to make him blush), but right now, he seemed completely sure of himself. Bold, even. The heat in Dream's stomach begins to spread. Clearly he liked this too.

From the backseat, Sapnap lets out a loud cough. Dream jumps slightly at the sound, his head whipping around to find the light in front of them has already turned green. Of course. He presses his foot on the gas, doing his best to ignore the flush of color rising in his cheeks. George, for his part, seems completely unaffected by the whole ordeal. His gaze is as unchanging as ever.

"Am I the only one in this car concerned about us getting home in one piece?" Sapnap demands, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Nick, you aren't even wearing your seatbelt," Dream points out, sending a chastising look back at him through the rearview mirror.

"I need freedom of movement," he retorts.

"Well, you're gonna have plenty of it if we *do* crash and you go flying through the windshield," Dream shoots back. Sapnap rolls his eyes, but grabs his seatbelt nonetheless, finally buckling in.

"Just don't crash, Dream," George says with a shrug. "Easy."

"You can't even drive." Dream reminds him, refusing to meet his gaze again. He's unwilling to get sucked into that whirlpool for a third time.

"Oh yeah!" Sapnap exclaims, letting out a loud laugh. "George, when are we getting you behind the wheel, baby boy?"

George swings around to glare at Sapnap, finally tearing his eyes away from Dream's face. Immediately, Dream feels their absence.

You're being needy, a very wise and reasonable voice in his head points out.

Shut up, a much louder and more fun part of his brain replies.

They do manage to make it home unscathed, and they even make pretty decent time, if Dream does say so himself. He does a much better job of keeping his eyes on the road during the second leg of their journey, but every time George turns his focus towards him again, Dream's mind latches onto it with a monomaniacal fervor. It would be incredibly easy to become addicted to this, he quickly realizes.

As he finally turns onto their street, George's attention shifts out the window, eyes tracing the very same roads Dream had walked alone only a couple of days ago. Dream has half a mind to ask him what he thinks, even before they've reached the house, but there ends up being no need. George provides his own running commentary as they go, letting his opinions be known as soon as they enter his head.

"The trees are cool."

"God, these houses are *huge*."

"I think the sky is bigger here. Does that make sense? It feels bigger."

Dream listens, a fond smile tugging at his lips. It's another pleasant day, and the sky is full of low and heavy clouds, resting against the horizon like mountains. The forecast had promised a storm in a few days (Dream had been checking the upcoming week's weather obsessively ever since George's flight had been booked), but for now, the sun is high and the world looks inviting.

Dream thinks of the garden, of soft dirt and impossible things. His home was beautiful, and now, George was here to share in it with him. Life had never felt sweeter.

Sapnap adds his own fair share of comments as well, listing off the various activities he's already decided they're going to do together around the city. Dream doesn't think he's ever heard him so excited, and George is matching him at every level, proudly detailing all the vlogging equipment he's already had shipped to their house. The two of them are so wrapped up in their conversation, they don't even notice when Dream finally pulls into the driveway. It's only when the garage door in front of them starts to slide open that George turns to look out the window once more.

"Oh," he murmurs, staring up at the house through the windshield. "We're here."

"We're here," Dream confirms, glancing over at him in a not-so-subtle attempt to gauge his reaction. George turns to him, a wide grin on his face, and it's all the reassurance Dream needs.

George looks happy to be home.

It doesn't take long to bring George's bags into the house and upstairs to his bedroom. He only brought two, after all, and there's already a stack of boxes waiting for him when he arrives, crowded against the wall by his closet. Dream stands back, hands shoved deep into his pockets in an attempt to keep them still as he watches George survey the room.

"Do you like it?" Dream ventures to ask after a moment. George turns around, an unreadable expression his face.

"The walls are blue," he murmurs. "In the video you sent, I didn't notice that."

"My idea," Sapnap pipes up, leaning back against George's desk. "And Dream helped too, I

guess.”

George looks between them, eyes gone huge, and Dream is surprised to see his lower lip tremble, just slightly, before he inhales sharply and turns away again. It wasn't that Dream was shocked, necessarily. George had always been a softie, deep down, and it was certainly an emotional day for all three of them. But still, Dream certainly hadn't expected something as simple as the color of the walls to have such an impact of him.

“It's really nice,” George mutters, back still turned to the two of them.

“We're glad you like it,” Dream says, sharing a quick glance with Sapnap, who nods in confirmation. “Obviously it's not decorated or anything, but I figured we could just buy some stuff. If you want.”

“Yeah,” George turns around again, wiping hastily at his eyes, chuckling slightly. “Sorry, I don't why I'm being weird.”

“It's not weird,” Dream assures, stepping further into the room. “It must've been...”

He trails off, unsure of what to say. Time passed so differently for the two of them, Dream had realized. Now that George was here, he couldn't imagine what the past few months had felt like from his perspective. All that time spent agonizing over the visa process, his future entirely out of his hands, with nothing to do but sit around and wait for the rest of his life to begin. Dream could sympathize, obviously, but while he had been waiting for George to arrive, George had been stuck in a half-life, forced to take everyday as it came, unable to plan for anything. Trapped. Dream's heart clenches unpleasantly at the thought. He's tempted to wrap George up in another embrace, but he stops himself. He figures it might be a bit overwhelming, to try and get George to unpack all of that right at this exact moment. He should at least get to sleep off the jet lag first.

“It must've been a long flight,” Dream finishes. George nods gratefully.

“Yeah,” he sighs, suddenly sounding incredibly tired. “It was.”

“Well, we should get dinner then,” Sapnap suggests. “I know it's kinda early, but you should probably eat something other than, like, shitty airplane food.”

“That would be great,” George agrees, wiping at his eyes again with the sleeve of his crewneck. He lets out another laugh, small and encouraging. “The airplane food *was* really shitty.”

“I'll order pizza,” Sapnap says, straightening up. Without prompting, Dream tugs out his wallet from his back pocket and hands Sapnap his card.

“Call the place on Main,” he suggests. “They have good garlic knots.”

“You're a smart man, Dream,” Sapnap grins, accepting the card. “I'll be right back.”

Sapnap heads out to make the call, and Dream turns back to George, watching him carefully. George meets his gaze immediately, and rolls his eyes.

“I'm fine,” he insists preemptively.

“I know!” Dream assures. George eyes him skeptically, but before he can say anything more, an idea enters Dream's head. “Hey. You need to meet Patches.”

George freezes, and Dream bursts out laughing, absolutely thrilled by his reaction. You'd think

Dream had just told him he was planning on introducing him to his mother (which, Dream realizes, he'd be doing soon too.)

"George," he says, stepping closer and putting his hands on his shoulder, anchoring him there. "She's gonna love you."

George looks up at him, a wary expression on his face.

"Where is she?" He finally asks. Dream grins, motioning with his head back towards the hallway.

"Come on," he says. "I have a feeling she's in my room."

Sure enough, when Dream pushes the door open to his bedroom, he spots Patches curled up in her favorite spot, at the top of the bed by his pillows. She's completely oblivious to the sudden entrance of visitors, but when Dream steps into the room, George remains by the door, his feet locked in place. Dream sighs, reaching down and tugging gently at George's sleeve.

"C'mon, Georgie," he encourages. "She's friendly, I swear."

Despite his clear reluctance, George allows himself to be led into the room, all the way over the bed, where he slowly crouches down until he's at eye level with her. At that moment, Patches begins to stir, her mouth parting in a wide yawn, exposing her small and pointy teeth. George watches, amazed.

"Hi," he murmurs quietly. "Hi, baby."

Slowly, he reaches a hand out, and begins to stroke the top of her head in soft, even motions. Dream doesn't take his eyes off him for a second. It's by far the most endearing thing he's ever seen. He's incredibly tempted to pull out his phone and start filming, just so he can preserve their first meeting forever, but he resists the temptation.

"Sweet girl," George coos, as Patches bumps her head up gingerly against his hand. It doesn't take long for her to begin purring, and when she does, a smile blooms across George's face. He turns to Dream, his excitement evident. "Oh my God, she loves me."

"See?" Dream laughs. "I told you."

"No, she loves me more than you now," George clarifies, climbing onto the bed easily and coming to sit beside her. Patches stretches out, and George begins scratching absently at the soft white fur on her tummy. "I'm clearly her new favorite."

Dream rolls his eyes, but he's unable to keep the smile off his face. He settles onto the bed as well, sitting beside George and beginning to scratch under Patches's chin.

"You're definitely gonna have to take that one up with Sapnap," Dream says. "Except you'll both be competing for second place."

"Hm, I don't know," George considers, tapping his chin thoughtfully. "She can obviously tell that I'm better than you."

Dream bumps him with his shoulder, jostling him slightly, and George laughs, retaliating by whacking Dream on the leg. It's amazing, how they can have these small moments of physicality now, the sort of stuff Dream used to long for, when they were thousands of miles apart and George's voice sounded irreconcilably distant on the other end of their calls. George returns his attention to Patches, but Dream keeps his eyes trained on his face, watching the content smile that

emerges. Though he'd never admit it, Patches *did* seem to have a unique appreciation for George. He'd never seen her so pliant and trusting around someone she'd just met. Dream's heart swells.

Of course she loved George instantly. It was sort of impossible not to.

They stay like that for a while, lavishing Patches with affection, until Sapnap calls them downstairs, letting them know the pizza will be there soon. Dream stands from the bed first, and without thinking, extends a hand down to George. He accepts it without hesitation, allowing Dream to help him off the bed.

"Will she come down?" He asks, glancing back at Patches.

"When she's ready," Dream says with a shrug. "She spends a lot of time in here though. So, if you ever wanna see her..."

He trails off, and George fixes him with a smirk, a knowing glint settling in his eyes.

"I should just come into your room," he finishes. Dream shrugs, trying to play it off casually, which George sees right through. He lets out an amused laugh. "Smooth, Dream. Really."

"I'm just saying!" Dream says, bringing his hands up defensively. George nods, his eyes doing an assessing sweep of the room around them. Dream didn't have much in terms of decorations; a neon sign hung on his wall, a handful of posters, some photos of his family, hung in frames by his desk. It's comfortable, and cozy, in Dream's opinion. A place that felt like him. George takes it all in, before his eyes settle on Dream again.

"I can think of worse places to spend my time," he finally says. Dream nods, biting back a grin. He was so easily charmed by George. He always had been, and now that they were together in person, the effect only seems to have grown stronger. Maybe it would worry him if he didn't enjoy it so damn much.

"Let's go," George speaks again, already heading for the door. "I was promised garlic knots."

Despite the fact that it's the same pizza Dream has had numerous times, served on paper plates and paired with room temperature soda, it's maybe the best meal he's ever eaten. George and Sapnap are a fucking whirlwind, bouncing off each other with a level of energy Dream has only ever seen over-active children exhibit. It's a mess, and so chaotic, and Dream loves every second of it, watching as his two best friends stand in the middle of the living room and make a great show of figuring out who can get their hand closer to the (very, very) high ceiling overhead. George wins (he does have at least an inch on Sapnap), and Sapnap retaliates by taking him out at the knees, sending them both crashing back into the couch. George grabs a pillow and begins beating it against his back. In the end, Dream tries to intervene, but is tugged into the pile with them, despite all his protests.

"Ok, with Dream it's not a fair fight," Sapnap insists, extracting himself from the couch. "Seriously, you're a freaking giant. It's unnatural."

"*What?*" Dream demands, flopping backwards against the cushions. "I am not."

"You are really tall, Dream," George says, coming to settle beside him. Dream adjusts his arm and George slides under it easily, allowing Dream to drape it over his shoulder. Silently, Sapnap raises an eyebrow.

“To be fair, you two are just short,” Dream insists, which earns him an elbow in the ribs. “What? I’m right.”

“And *I’m* getting water,” Sapnap cuts in, fixing Dream with another amused look. “Don’t get into any trouble while I’m gone.”

Dream opens his mouth to ask him exactly what he meant by that, but before he can, Sapnap has already left. Dream sighs, sinking back into the couch further. The wreckage of their meal is strewn across the table in front of them. He’s gonna be able to fill an entire trash bag with all the empty pizza boxes. Beside him, George lets his head loll over to the side, bumping into Dream’s shoulder as he turns to look at him.

“You tired?” Dream asks, retuning his voice to a more reasonable octave.

“A bit,” George shrugs. “But...I don’t know. I don’t wanna sleep.”

“Why?” Dream asks.

“Today is really good,” George says simply. “I don’t want it to be over yet.”

A warmth spreads through Dream’s entire body, settling beneath his heart.

“Yeah,” he agrees. “Me neither.”

When Sapnap returns, they end up picking out a movie to watch, some Marvel film Dream hasn’t seen yet. Evening passes easily into night, the sky turning indigo outside, and George remains pressed to Dream’s side, eyes never straying from the screen. Dream steals a few glances now and then, but he’s surprised by how normal it feels, how relaxed. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to imagine a time where George *wasn’t* here, taking up space beside him, folding himself easily into the gaps Dream creates. At one point, Sapnap suggests they raid the kitchen for snacks, and George agrees, hopping up easily from the couch. Dream watches him go, his hand unconsciously flexing at the sudden absence of warmth. Sapnap catches the movement, because of course he does, and Dream turns back to the TV, trying to school his expression.

“You know,” Sapnap says, coming to lean down over the back of the couch. “He’s not going anywhere.”

“Shut up,” Dream mutters, bringing his arm down hastily to rest in his lap. Surely he hadn’t been that obvious. Had he?

“How come you never held me like that when I moved in?” Sapnap asks, frowning thoughtfully. Dream swats his face away, which only leads to Sapnap making some exaggerated kissing noises at him before finally heading off into the kitchen.

When the two of them return, arms full of bags of chips and pretzels, George settles into the space beside Dream without preamble. For a moment, Dream remains still, hands still resting in lap. Then, George begins nudging at his arm, an expectant expression on his face. Instantly, the tension drains out of Dream’s body. He brings his arm up around the back of the couch again, and George relaxes back against it, a soft smile on his face. It feels natural. It feels like them.

The first movie turns into a second movie, which turns into the beginnings of a third. Dream dozes off at one point, and when he comes to, bleary eyed and stiff-necked, he realizes that Sapnap and George have drifted off as well. Over in the arm chair, Sapnap is snoring softly, and beside him, George has fallen over onto his side, so he’s curled up on one end of the couch, feet pressing against Dream’s thigh. Dream grins, gingerly rising from his position. He figures he can get most

of the cleaning done without either of them stirring.

It takes a few trips back and forth, but pretty soon, the living room has been cleared of debris. Dream shoves everything into trash bags in the kitchen, placing them by the garage door so he remembers to take them out in the morning, and refills Patches water bowl while he's at it, in case she decides to wander downstairs during the night. It's still quiet in the house, the only sound coming from the muffled fight scene playing on the TV, so when Dream returns to the living room, he's surprised to see George has woken up.

"Hey," Dream murmurs, making sure to keep his voice low. "What's-"

He stops short. George is holding a sandwich in his hand, the same one Dream had crushed in his pocket back at the airport. The plastic around it has been unwrapped, and George appears to have every intention of eating it, despite how soggy and unappetizing it looks.

"What are you doing?" Dream asks. George looks up at him in surprise.

"Uh, eating a sandwich?" He says, clearly thrown off by the question.

"Yeah, your gross old one from the airport," Dream points out, coming to stand over him. George shrugs.

"I'm sure it's still fine," he mutters, going to take a bite. "I know we already had dinner but I'm still hungry, so-"

"George!" Dream exclaims, letting out an incredulous laugh. "That cannot possibly taste good. Here, give it."

He reaches for it expectantly. With a great deal of reluctance, George hands it over, his lips jutting out in discontented pout.

"If you're hungry, I'll just make you something," Dream offers.

George raises his eyebrows, clearly taken aback.

"Oh," he murmurs. "You will?"

"Yeah, sure," Dream shrugs. "What do you want? I'm pretty sure I have stuff to make a grilled cheese."

For a moment, George seems genuinely torn, his eyes flitting back over to the sandwich in Dream's hand. Then, after a clear moment of deliberation, he finally nods.

"Ok, sure," he agrees. "You can make me a grilled cheese."

"Oh, can I now?" Dream teases. George huffs, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You were the one who offered-"

"George," Dream interrupts, a small smile on his face. He extends a hand down, which George eyes warily. "Come on. I *want* to make you a grilled cheese."

After another moment, George accepts his hand, and allows himself to be pulled to his feet. He follows Dream to the kitchen without protest.

Dream flicks on the lights over the stove, but keeps the overhead ones off, so the kitchen is bathed

in a soft, orange glow. He heads towards the fridge while, behind him, George lofts himself easily onto the countertop, stocking feet swinging off the side. A comfortable silence settles around them as Dream collects his ingredients and grabs a pan from the cabinet. George's eyes never leave him - even when Dream turns his back, he can feel the heat of his gaze. When Dream comes to stand in front of the stovetop, George scooches over slightly so he's right next to him, watching the entire process with rapt attention. Dream drops a bit of butter onto the pan, allowing it to melt slowly.

"You're looking at me like you've never seen someone make a grilled cheese before," Dream murmurs, titling his head to catch George's eye. George shrugs, bringing up a hand and brushing some hair away from his forehead. Dream tracks the movement, absently wondering how it would feel if it was his hand running through those dark locks.

"No one's ever cooked for me before," he says. "I mean, other than my family."

"Oh," Dream nods, grabbing a slice of bread and placing it on the pan. "That...makes sense, I guess. My family was always the one cooking for me, or I was cooking for myself, but now..."

He shrugs, grabbing a couple slices of cheese and placing them on top of the bread.

"I don't know. I like cooking. I make dinner for me and Nick sometimes," he says, sparing another glance at George out of the corner of his eyes. "And now that you're here..."

George raises an eyebrow, an incredulous smile tugging at his lips, as if he's half-expecting a punchline to arrive.

"You'll...cook for me?" He finishes, clearly unsure. Dream nods.

"Yeah," he says, grabbing the final slice of bread and pressing it down on top of the cheese. "If you want."

George doesn't speak for a moment. Dream looks at him again, then back the pan, not wanting to seem like he's prying. George had these moments, sometimes, where he pulled away a bit. It wasn't hiding, exactly. More like he was holding back. George had always kept his cards close to his chest, that was nothing new, but between the two of them, he tended to show his hand eventually. Dream just had to give him time. Let him know that it was safe to do. George had always done the same for him, after all. Allowed Dream to be dramatic, and loud, and pissed off, and defensive, and over-excited, and heartbroken. And Dream had never felt judged by him for it, not once. In fact, for all his soft edges, George was perhaps one of the steadiest people Dream had ever met. Unwavering, in a way that had always made Dream feel like he was completely safe with him. He just hoped George felt that it was mutual.

"I'd like that," George finally says, breaking the silence. Dream turns to him, a faint look of surprise on his face, but George just smiles and ducks his head down, a light blush rising on his cheeks.

"Ok," Dream agrees, grinning. "Cool. Uh, I can also make more than grilled cheeses. Just so you know."

"Grilled cheeses are fine with me," George says, as Dream moves to grab a spatula from the holder near the stove. He flips the sandwich over, pleased to find a light golden brown crust on the other side.

"No, but I mean I can *really* cook," Dream insists. "Like, I can make a fucking great steak. Seriously. And pasta, too. I made this really good vodka sauce the other day, with tomatoes. Nick

doesn't even like tomatoes and he said it was great."

He's bragging a bit, he knows that, but George just lets him speak, looking vaguely amused by the whole thing. It doesn't take much longer for the sandwich to finish cooking, and once it's done, Dream grabs a plate from the cabinet and slides it off the pan. Then, with a flourish, he presents it to George.

"There," he says. "A perfect grilled cheese."

George laughs, eyeing the sandwich skeptically. "Perfect?"

"Yes," Dream nods solemnly. "Statistically perfect. *Scientifically* perfect. According to...many scientists."

George raises an eyebrow, but picks up the sandwich nonetheless. Dream watches eagerly as he takes a bite. Then, slowly, George's eyes go wide.

"Oh, whoa," he says, mouth still full of food. "This is *really* good."

"Right?" Dream grins. "One might even say perfect."

George takes another bite, clearly not wanting to stop eating for long enough to finish the conversation. He ends up hopping down off the counter eventually, plate still in hand, and Dream follows him back to the living room where they settle on the couch again. George seems incredibly pleased with the sandwich, which of course makes Dream incredibly pleased as well. He devours it quickly, and when he's done, he even tells Dream again how much he liked it, which Dream maybe appreciates a bit more than he should. It's only a sandwich, after all. Still, Dream can't help but feel gratified. He was the first person to ever cook for George. And George had *really* liked it.

"You need to teach me how to make one like that," George says, setting the plate down on the coffee table. "Seriously, mine never turned out that good."

"It's easy once you practice a bit," Dream assures. "We can have a grilled cheese boot camp."

George snickers, "Of course you would take sandwich making that seriously."

"It's an art form, George," Dream insists. "If you can do it, you can master it."

George rolls his eyes, but he's still got a smile on his face. Then, from the arm chair, Sapnap lets out a rumbling snore. George glances over to him, then up at the TV, where the movie continues to play.

"You tired yet?" Dream asks.

"Yeah," George nods. Then, much to Dream surprise, he settles further into the couch, turning on his side slightly, so his entire body is facing Dream. "Let's go to sleep."

"Here?" Dream asks. "Don't you wanna go upstairs? Sleep in your own room?"

George shakes his head, "Not tonight."

Perhaps there's something left unsaid there, but Dream decides not to push for more details, choosing instead to simply nod. He grabs the remote on the table and turns the TV off, before standing up and moving to switch off the light. The whole room is plunged into a soft, inky darkness, the only light coming from the full moon hanging in the sky over their backyard.

On the couch, George has already snatched up a blanket, and is stretching out on his side, his head resting against a pillow. Dream pads across the room silently towards him, before sinking to the floor, a small smile on his face.

“Are we having a sleepover?” He whispers, settling down so he’s looking right at George, their faces mere inches apart. In the strange wash of moonlight, his skin looks almost silver. “Is that what this is?”

“Yup,” George says, matching his tone. “And you’re the kid who only got invited because someone’s mom said they had to.”

Dream snickers. “And you’re the kid who has to leave early because nobody likes you.”

George grins, tugging the blanket further up his shoulders. Despite the fact that he’s sitting in a house that *he* owns, Dream really does feel like a kid again, forced to keep his voice low lest he wake up his mom upstairs. He tucks his knees up to his chest, resting his chin on top of them. Even in the relative darkness of the room, Dream can see the way George’s eyes flit across his face, furtive and searching.

“What are you doing?” He asks, voice still at a whisper.

“I’m still not used to it,” George murmurs, sounding a bit shy. His eyes do another sweep of Dream’s face, as if trying to drink everything in. It makes Dream’s mouth feel incredibly dry, to be pinned under such an intense gaze again. It’s certainly not an unpleasant feeling, though. In fact, he’s starting to realize he likes it quite a lot, having all of George’s attention so directly fixed on him.

“Used to what?” Dream asks.

“Looking at you,” George says. His eyes settle, for the briefest moment, on Dream’s mouth, then dart back up to meet his eyes. “It doesn’t feel real.”

“Yeah,” Dream agrees, chuckling softly. “I know what you mean.”

George nods, contemplatively. Then, he does something that throws Dream’s entire world off kilter. He reaches across the small space between them and, with a great deal of tenderness, traces his thumb along the ridge of Dream’s cheekbone. Dream holds his breath, forcing himself to remain still as George begins to map along the ridge of his jaw, down the bridge of his nose, across the arc of his eyebrow. His fingers are soft and fleeting, but each touch feels monumental, amplified to a degree of intensity that sends Dream reeling. His eyes flutter shut, just for a moment, as he allows him to feel everything. Then, George’s hand comes to rest just underneath his chin, propping it up slightly. Dream opens his eyes again.

“What was that?” He asks, rather belatedly.

“I don’t know,” George says. “I just...wanted to.”

Dream nods, “Ok.”

And then, because he never did know when to stop:

“Is there anything else you want?”

George’s eyes widen, just barely, but Dream notices it right away. Then, slowly, George shakes his head.

“Not right now,” he murmurs. “This is perfect.”

Dream melts into a smile, his whole body feeling sleepy and warm.

“It is,” he agrees. “I can’t tell you how many times I thought about your first night here.”

“And is it everything you ever dreamed of?” George asks teasingly.

“Better,” Dream assures. “You’re even more beautiful in person.”

George presses his hands over his face, clearly trying to hide a smile.

“You’re an idiot,” he mumbles, mouth partially covered.

“I’m being serious,” Dream insists, feeling giddy and reckless and completely enamored. Slowly, George lowers his hands, and fixes him with an incredulous stare. Then, he rolls over onto his back, sliding over on the couch and lifting up the blanket.

“Come on,” he says, motioning for Dream to come up beside him. “Sleep, now.”

Dream doesn’t need to be told twice. Carefully, he lifts himself up onto the couch beside George, lying down so that his head is resting on the pillow beside him. George turns to lay on his side once more, tucking his head against Dream’s chest, his forehead pressed against his sternum. Carefully, so as not to disturb their position, Dream reaches an arm out and places it around George’s back, letting it rest there.

“Goodnight, Dream,” George murmurs, his eyes sliding shut. Dream looks down at him, and recalls all the times he heard those words said over a call, George’s voice fractured by distance, nothing like how it sounded here, tonight, when Dream could feel the reverberations of the words in his own chest. Dream is seized, for a moment, by a breath-taking desperation, a misplaced terror that tomorrow, he will wake up, and all of this will have disappeared, and he will be left alone again. Unconsciously, his arm brings George closer against his chest.

Then, George lets out a soft breath, face burrowing into the soft fabric of Dream’s t-shirt, and Dream realizes that nothing *this* real could ever fade as so many figments of his imagination eventually had. With every moment that passed with George still in his arms, the specter of loneliness grew less and less threatening, until its presence in Dream’s mind felt barely tangible at all.

Sapnap was right. George wasn’t going anywhere. And Dream had to allow himself the luxury of trusting that a life this beautiful *could* last, that it wasn’t some fickle thing.

Dream closes his eyes and listens to the faint sound of George’s breathing, until he begins to feel his own heartbeat line up with it, exhaustion falling on him all at once like a thick cover of fog. In another moment, he can feel himself sinking.

“Goodnight, George,” he whispers back, and finally, lets sleep take over.

Pancakes/Crepes

Dream wakes up naturally the next morning, which strikes him as odd for two reasons.

First of all, it's *morning*. Dream can't recall the last time he was actually awake at such a reasonable hour. His sleep schedule had been in one of its cyclical ruts the past week or so, meaning he had been falling asleep when the sun was beginning to rise, if he slept at all. So, already, being up before noon was enough to give him pause.

The second strange thing was the fact that he hadn't set an alarm and yet, inexplicably, he was awake. Now *that* was really odd. Usually, waking up was a multi-step process for Dream. It took him ages to actually rouse himself, and when he did eventually force his eyes open, his brain usually remained clouded for at least another hour as his body urged him to crawl back into bed. His spurts of energy almost always came late at night, which often led to groggy and unpleasant mornings (or, in his case, afternoons), and yet here he was, blinking against the sun, his usual exhaustion no longer clinging onto him.

Waking up had been easy. Effortless.

Slowly, Dream raises himself onto his elbows, rotating his neck in an attempt to dispel the crick that's formed in it. Sleeping on the couch, with another full grown person, might not have been the smartest move. Still, despite the odd angle he'd ended up dozing off at, it had clearly been a pleasant sleep, judging by how well-rested he feels now. He reaches a hand up, rubbing absently at his eyes, and it's only then that he realizes the couch beside him is empty. Dream turns to the survey the rest of the living room, but there's no sign of George, or Sapnap, for that matter. He sits up, stretching his arms high over his head, the bottom of his t-shirt riding up slightly as he tries to discern where exactly everyone went.

The first clue is the sound of the shower upstairs. A moment after Dream registers the sound of running water overhead, he picks up on the muffled sound of music, followed by a loud, echoing singing voice. Sapnap. He must've taken a speaker into the bathroom with him. Dream sighs, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck, massaging it lightly. There's one mystery solved.

Then, from the hallway, Patches pads into the room, her nose raised inquisitively towards the air. Dream grins, reaching down and scooping her up into his arms, which she takes in stride. She was more than used to Dream picking her up at pretty much every given opportunity. He presses his nose into the soft fur of her neck, mumbling soft greetings to her.

"Morning, baby girl. How'd you sleep?"

Patches, of course, doesn't say anything. She just stares owlshly out at the living room, then peers up at Dream, before raising a single, white paw and batting it lightly against his face. He lets out a laugh, his throat still scratchy with sleep.

"Nice to see you too," he says. Her nose twitches slightly, and her focus returns to the air once more. Dream frowns, glancing around the room, trying to discern if there's a stray piece of pizza she was sniffing out that had been left behind from the night before. Then, all at once, the scent hits him.

Something is burning.

Dream is on his feet in a second, placing Patches gently on the couch behind him before he takes

off in the direction of the kitchen, almost tripping over his own feet as he goes. The smoke detector hadn't gone off, which meant there probably wasn't a fire, but something could've gone wrong with it. Maybe the oven had been left on, or one of Sapnap's (many, *many*) candles had finally set the house on fire, or maybe -

Dream swings around the corner into the kitchen, surprised to find it completely in tact. Well, sort of.

There's a great deal of mess strewn across the counter near the stovetop. He sees a bag of flour, the same one he'd used to make the bread earlier that week, but the entire top of it has been ripped open, leaving flour scattered in a wide circle around it. There's a jug of milk too, and some egg shells discarded in a haphazard pile by the sink. Dream steps further into the room, examining the wreckage.

Then, from his position in front of the stove, George turns around.

"It's not burnt," he insists, holding a pan aloft in one hand.

"George-" Dream says cautiously.

"It's not! Look," he pauses, all his focus returning to the pan in front of him. Dream watches as he steadies himself, and then, in one fluid motion of his wrist, sends the contents of the pan flying into the air. He catches it easily, shooting Dream a wide smile as he does. "See?"

Dream comes closer, trying to get a better look at what the hell George was actually making.

"Look, it's golden brown," George says, shoving the (still very hot) pan towards Dream. Dream stares down at it. "Not burnt."

"You're making...crepes?" Dream asks.

"Pancakes," George corrects.

"They're crepes," Dream replies immediately. George fixes him with a glare, finally returning the pan to the (still lit, and turned on very high) burner. Dream stares at him, dumb-founded. It's a miracle nothing *did* catch on fire.

Dream turns his head on a swivel, still trying to make sense of exactly what he's seeing. Part of him is convinced he must still be asleep, and that this is some weird hallucination brought on by re-watching George's cooking stream one too many times (Not that that was something he did. Well, not all that often at least.)

"Will you grab me a plate?" George asks, interrupting his thoughts. "This one is almost done."

Still dumb-struck, Dream can do nothing but nod and head over to the cabinet where they keep their tableware. He grabs one of the larger plates, part of a matching set from Ikea his mom had picked out, and returns to George's side, watching him warily. George raises the pan again, and slides the crepe onto the plate, a satisfied smile on his face.

"There," he says proudly. "It's...not great. But the next one will be better."

It's clear George has been awake far longer than Dream, his normal sleep schedule (if you could call it that) likely thrown off by jet lag. He's already showered, judging by the slight bit of moisture in his hair, making it more unruly than usual. He's also changed out of his clothes from the night before into a new pair of sweatpants and a large, white t-shirt. Standing this close, Dream

can smell the faint scent of his *own* shampoo, lingering in George's hair. *Holy shit*. George smells like him.

His brain trips over this fact, desperate to linger there longer, but before he can, George is nudging him with his hip slightly, prompting Dream to move to the side. Dream does, and George scoots into his space, picking up a knife he'd left on the counter and slicing off another sliver from the pad of butter beside it. Dream watches as George drops the butter in the pan, swirling it around a bit until it melts away into nothing.

It's then that Dream finally realizes what the hell is going on. Took him long enough, he figures, but his brain had needed some time to adapt to the surreality of the situation. Not even 24 hours ago, he and George still hadn't even met in person yet. Now, George was in his kitchen, moving around it like he'd been living in the house for years. No wonder it had taken him a second to determine that he wasn't actually dreaming.

"You're making breakfast," Dream finally says. George spares a glance up at him.

"Yeah," he says, moving to grab the mixing bowl on the other side of the stovetop. "I thought that was obvious. You do eat pancakes, right?"

"Crepes," Dream corrects. George ignores him, pouring a small bit of batter from the bowl into the pan. Dream watches as the dollop in the center begins to spread, until the whole pan is coated with it. "But you're...you're really making us breakfast?"

"Yes, Dream," George huffs out a laugh, looking a bit embarrassed. "I *can* cook, you know. I mean, I don't do it that much, but it has been known to happen."

"Oh," Dream nods, still feeling a bit disorientated by the scene playing out in front of him. It did seem like the sort of thing he'd make up in his own head. He's once again hit the with impulse to ask George to pinch him. "Uh, cool."

George nods, his attention still centered on the pan in front of him. "Sapnap showed me where everything was before he went to shower, and since I was already up, I just figured--"

"Wait, how long have you been awake for?" Dream finally thinks to ask. George shrugs.

"I don't know, a hour or so." He spares a quick glance at Dream, a private smile on his lips. "You're a cute sleeper by the way."

"Oh my God," Dream groans, embarrassment swiftly coloring his face. "I didn't say anything, did I?"

Not that it would be the first time he'd spoken in his sleep in front of George. There had been the infamous "I love you" incident a few years back and while nothing as humiliating had slipped out since then (at least, not as far as he knew) he had still woken up numerous times to find George giggling on the other end of the call, eager to inform him of all the weird shit Dream had muttered about while he was unconscious.

"No, not really," George assures. "You just sort of...murmured, a bit. And you--"

George cuts himself off with a laugh, which is truly terrifying, given the context. Oh God, did Dream get too clingy during the night? Did he accidentally kiss George's earlobe or something? The thought makes his stomach drop.

"You look all grumpy when you sleep," George continues, still a bit breathless. "It's like--"

He stops again, turning to face Dream before furrowing his brow and pouting slightly. Dream gapes at him.

"I do *not* look like that," he insists.

"Yes, you do," George says with a grin. "Like a baby!"

Dream opens his mouth to defend himself, but then it dawns on him that there's really no dignified way to say *I am not a baby*. So, he stays silent, narrowing his eyes as George lets out another delighted laugh before returning his attention to the pan once more. He does the same flipping motion again, sending the crepe flying into the air. It lands in the pan slightly off center, and George pokes at it a bit with his finger, trying to fix the small fold.

"Be careful, idiot," Dream chastises softly, moving to grab a spatula. "You're gonna burn yourself."

"No I won't," George insists, but when Dream offers the spatula to him, he takes it.

A warm silence settles between them, the only sound coming from the soft bubbling of the batter heating up in the pan. George stares down at the crepe intently, clearly trying to get the timing just right. Dream watches him in profile, dwelling on the soft slope of his nose, the way his lips are parted, just slightly, a sure sign of his concentration. *He must know I'm looking at him*, Dream realizes suddenly. He wasn't exactly being subtle about it, and George could actually *see him now*, which was something Dream still had to keep reminding himself of. There was no black screen anymore. If George looked at him, he'd see Dream looking back.

And yet, George didn't seem to mind. In fact, he seemed quite comfortable with it. George slides the next crepe onto the plate and begins to repeat the process over again, preparing the pan with butter just as he'd done before. Clearly, Dream's gaze wasn't throwing him off his rhythm.

"You shaved," Dream murmurs, finally taking note of the lack of stubble along George's jaw.

"Mhm," George confirms, hand reaching for the mixing bowl. Then, in a moment of pure, thoughtless impulse, Dream reaches a hand up and brushes it lightly against George's cheek, feeling the smoothness of his skin. George turns to look at him, and Dream's hand freezes, fingers still ghosting along George's jawline.

"You have...nice skin," he says. *Oh my God*. Nice skin? What the fuck was wrong with him?

"Thanks," George says, seeming strangely unaffected by the whole thing. "You, uh, just wanted to feel it for yourself?"

Despite himself, Dream lets out a small laugh.

"Yeah, I guess so," he says, feeling a bit sheepish. "Sorry. I think I'm also still getting used to everything. Like...you actually being here. It's a lot to wrap my head around."

It's a flimsy excuse for such odd behavior, but Dream really can't think of anything else to say. He was being truthful, after all. The entire house felt different with George inside it. Before, it had felt like Dream was walking around with his ghost - constantly hearing his voice but never seeing his face, thinking of him everyday without having the opportunity to be near him, to touch him. Like he'd been living in a haunted house.

Now, George was here, and everything had come alive around him. So it wasn't necessarily surprising that Dream had been seized with the urge to reach out and touch him, to confirm that he was real and tangible, not something Dream's hand would simply phase straight through.

George looks at him for a moment, a thoughtful expression on his face. *Any minute now*, Dream thinks to himself, *he's gonna call me a weirdo, and it will be incredibly well deserved.*

George doesn't say anything, though. He just reaches up, exactly as Dream had done, and runs his fingers along Dream's jaw, scratching lightly at his stubble.

"I, uh, probably should shave too," Dream mutters self-consciously. In the lead up to George's arrival, he'd let a few smaller, daily habits fall by the wayside, shaving being one of them. Now, he was regretting it. He probably looked a bit like a caveman.

"If you want," George says with a shrug. "You do know how, right?"

Dream rolls his eyes, lightly batting George's hand away. George takes it in stride, grinning up at him brightly. It's only then that Dream realizes his *own* hand is still lightly cupping George's face, thumb pressed into the small hollow of his cheekbone. He drops it hastily, stepping back out of George's orbit. George looks at him for a moment, and Dream swears he's about to say something, but at the last second he turns away, finally grabbing the mixing bowl and bringing it back to the stove.

Dream knew he could be a bit much sometimes. He'd never been the best at reigning himself in, and around George, it felt borderline impossible. He became a creature of impulse, wanting to follow every small desire that entered into his brain, to make up for all the years where he could do nothing but sit and wait, frustration building up inside of him like bile. He'd felt sick with it, sometimes, all that longing. The relief of George finally being beside him was akin to a fever breaking. Dream felt well again.

But the last thing in the world he wanted to do was overwhelm him. Particularly this early on, while George was still in the process of settling in. *Christ*, he hadn't even slept in his own room yet. Maybe he should go, allow George to have his own space, not hover so damn much all the time. He certainly didn't want to stick around until George felt like he had to *ask*. That would be a nightmare.

But just as Dream is about to open his mouth and utter some excuse to leave, George reaches for him, fingers pinching lightly at the bottom of Dream's t-shirt. Dream stares down at George's hand and watches in amazement as George begins to tug him back towards him. He doesn't say a word, he doesn't even look up from the pan, but the second Dream is back in his personal bubble, so close their feet are practically touching, George drops the hem of his shirt and relaxes.

Dream's brain makes a series of garbled, high-pitched noises. It feels like a full minute before he can even process a coherent thought again.

It occurs to him then that, maybe, George *liked* having him close just as much as Dream liked being close to him.

George slides another crepe off the pan, the stack beside him steadily growing. The whole kitchen is awash in a speckled, golden light, the sun streaming in through the large window above the sink, looking out over their backyard. Outside, Dream catches a glimpse of the shifting surface of their pool, casting the sky back onto itself in fragments, and the line of trees beyond it. Morning had arrived gently, and the world around them is calm and still.

There are a million questions Dream wants to ask, details of George's mind that he's desperate to uncover, but he holds back. He was swiftly learning that, in all his overthinking, there was a great deal of pleasure to be found in simplicity. George had wanted Dream to stand near him, so he'd brought him there. It was as simple as that.

Dream relaxes against the counter, content to watch as George makes steady progress on their breakfast, his hand delicately gripping the spatula as he brings it down around the edge of the crepe. *Hands*. George had really nice hands.

"I thought about stuff like this a lot, you know," George murmurs quietly, barely audible over the soft hum of the stove.

"Huh?" Dream asks, eyes flicking back up to his face. George shrugs, not meeting Dream's eyes.

"Just...doing stuff together," he says. "Boring stuff. Like, I'd be doing the most boring thing in the world, I'd be doing my *laundry* and I'd think, what if Dream was here, and I was doing this with him?"

"You wanted to do laundry with me?" Dream asks, his voice small and full of wonder. George nods, chuckling slightly.

"It's dumb," he says.

"It's not, George," Dream assures. George shoots him a skeptical look, as if he's expecting Dream to poke fun at him, but Dream just meets his gaze, his expression open and earnest.

Once again, Dream finds himself wanting to stumble into confessions, let George know exactly how much he thought about him, not just sometimes, but every moment of every day, as unconscious and automatic as breathing. It wasn't just that he had wanted to be there when George was alone in London, during the worst stretch of the past few months, when the waiting had reached its most brutal apex. He had wanted to be with George *all the time*. Far beyond their more recent years of friendship, Dream wished he had known George ages ago, when he was a kid, that he'd been there for *everything*, every minor, boring detail, every childhood football game, every first day of school.

Sometimes, Dream's mind went as far as to play tricks on him. Because when he thought of his own life, of his own childhood, there were memories where George was inexplicably there, long before they'd ever even met. When Dream had fallen off his bike and hurt his knee so bad he'd needed stitches, it had been George who'd helped him up off the pavement. When Dream was 12 years old and getting in daily fights with his parents, screaming matches that left his throat blistered and raw, it was George who had walked with him around the park at dusk until he felt like he could breathe again. Now that he'd had the opportunity to know George, after all these years, it had become impossible for Dream to picture a version of his life where he wasn't there.

"You know, before you got here," Dream says suddenly, letting out a soft laugh. "I *really* missed you."

George turns to look at him, his eyes catching the light. He doesn't say anything, not for a while. It almost looks as if he's holding his breath. Then, slowly, he nods.

"I missed you too, Dream," he murmurs.

A few breaths pass between them. For the first time in what feels like ages, Dream's brain doesn't default back into over-analysis. He feels no need to pick apart the situation, no desire to dissect his own reactions or behavior. George's eyes meet his own and everything else falls away. Dream feels quiet.

Then, a thought dawns on him.

"Have you ever cooked for anyone before?" He asks. George's eyes widen, just barely, and he

turns back to the pan, rescuing the crepe before it has the chance to burn and sliding it onto the plate.

“No,” he admits, sounding a bit reluctant. Dream’s entire face lights up.

“So, technically,” he begins, leaning down slightly, positioning himself right over George’s shoulder, “if I were to eat one of these before Nick, *I* would be the first person you’ve ever cooked for.”

George turns his head slightly, glaring at Dream, who is desperately trying to fight off his own laughter. George sighs.

“Yes, Dream,” he concedes. “Technically, you would be.”

Before George even has the chance to react, Dream reaches a hand out and snatches a crepe off the plate. He takes a few steps back, away from the stove. George turns to him, mouth agape, and watches as Dream folds the crepe up and stuffs the entire thing in his mouth.

A few seconds tick by. Neither of them speak. Then -

“FUCK!” Dream exclaims through his mouthful of food. “Shit, it’s really hot!”

George stares at him for a moment, eyes huge, before doubling over in a fierce fit of laughter, watching as Dream frantically fans at his own mouth.

“Oh my god!” George laughs. “You are *such* an idiot!”

Dream glares at him, trying his best to look intimidating in spite of the fact that his cheeks are inflated like a squirrel, and George fucking *loses it*. He’s laughing so hard he’s almost in tears, and if Dream wasn’t in so much pain, he’d probably find it pretty endearing.

“You are so dumb,” George says through gasps of air, leaning his weight back against the counter. “You are literally the dumbest person in the world!”

“Shut up,” Dream insists, finally managing to chew and swallow the (still extremely hot) crepe. George brings his hands up over his mouth, looking overjoyed.

“Can you do that again, actually?” He asks. “I wanna make a TikTok.”

“You are an asshole,” Dream says accusingly. “You just like seeing me in pain.”

George cocks an eyebrow, and Dream shoots him a firm glare.

“Don’t,” he warns.

“I didn’t say anything,” George defends, pressing a hand over his heart in an overdramatic gesture of innocence. Dream rolls his eyes.

“Yeah, well, you were about to,” he mutters, stepping closer to the stove once more, back into George’s orbit. “Freak.”

George looks up at him, and Dream really doesn’t think he’s ever gonna get tired of that, the sight of George having to crane his neck up, just slightly, to meet Dream’s eyes. It sends a sharp thrill up his spine, something almost like pride but stranger, harder to pin down. A hot pulse of adrenaline settles somewhere below his throat, suddenly making it very difficult to swallow.

While Dream had never been a particularly ascetic person, he still liked to imagine that he excelled at discipline. He could control what he ate, when he worked, when he exercised - despite the erratic nature of his schedule, and his tendency to focus on things with an intensity that may have worried some, he was remarkably good at telling himself no. It wasn't self-denial, necessarily. Just a very strict form of self-control.

And yet, the more time he spent around George, the less and less self-control seemed like a viable option, let alone a desirable one. George didn't exactly have the best track record for it himself, after all. He indulged where Dream held back, chased after feeling *good*, rather than feeling productive, or accomplished, or correct, three things Dream almost constantly strove for. Before, Dream had found it anywhere from mildly frustrating to completely infuriating. Trying to get someone like that to meet a deadline, or focus on a project that wasn't particularly enjoyable, was like pulling teeth. But now, as George steps forward to meet him, their stocking feet knocking against each other lightly, Dream finds himself desperate to know where he would end up if he subscribed to a similar philosophy.

"You were the one dumb enough to put hot food right off the stove into your mouth," George reminds, cocking his head to the side. "All because you wanted to beat *Sapnap*. That's sad, Dream. Pathetic, even."

"And now, I'm the first person you've ever cooked for, and you can never take it back," Dream says, painting a self-satisfied grin on his face, despite the fact that the roof of his mouth still feels molten. "It's sweet George, you can't even deny it."

"Oh, congrats," George says, nodding. "At least you get to be my first in *something*."

Dream feels his mouth twitch, a smile threatening to break through, but he bites it back, shaking his head at George's quip.

"You're disgusting," he insists, doing a very poor job of hiding his own amusement. George, for his part, looks positively thrilled. Like he has Dream exactly where he wants him. Which is, apparently, less than an inch apart, so close he can see the way George's pupils have expanded, large enough that they threaten to swallow the irises that frame them.

"Are you gonna keep distracting me?" George asks. "Or will you allow me to continue being awesome and finish making breakfast?"

"You find me distracting?" Dream asks, teasingly. His words leave the perfect space for a retort. Perhaps he even set George up a little *too* well. But instead of rolling his eyes, or biting back with a *yeah, distractingly ugly*, George just looks at up him, a contemplative expression on his face. Dream shifts on his feet, thrown off by the unexpected weight he suddenly feels in George's gaze.

"Sometimes," George replies, his voice soft. Honest. As if he's testing the waters. His gaze flits up to the meet Dream's again, eyes dark and unwavering. "What do you think I should do about it?"

"I-" Dream falters, eyes searching his face. There's no break in his composure, no sign that this might be a joke. It's a startling departure from Dream's expectations. Between the two of them, there had almost always been an unspoken rule, an easy out they could always take advantage of, which was that nothing ever *had* to be serious, not really. George had always been remarkably good at brushing things off, never one to take anything too seriously, particularly when it came to his friends, but now, there's no hint of his usual levity. And yet, no discomfort either. He seems perfectly content to stand there, Dream growing hot under his gaze, waiting for...

For what, exactly? A response, surely. But what could Dream say? Of course, he had an idea of

what he *wanted* George to do. The list of things he wanted George to do had been started long ago, and seemed to only be growing now that he was actually standing here in front of him. Dream inhales, forcing himself to remember exactly where he was, and *who* he was talking to. George was his best friend, and he'd only just moved in, to the house they were planning on sharing for the foreseeable future. Not to mention the fact that it was 11 in the morning and they were standing in the middle of the kitchen. He needed to get a hold of himself.

"I think," he begins, keeping his tone level, "you should finish making breakfast. Something tell me this is a rare occurrence. I need to enjoy it while it lasts."

George huffs out a laugh, his eyes lingering on Dream for just a second longer before he finally turns his attention back to the stove. Incrementally, like water through a sieve, the tension begins to drain from Dream's body, leaving him with a gaping emptiness, somewhere in his gut. All of a sudden, he feels famished.

"Exactly," George says breezily. "You should be more grateful."

"Grateful for what?"

Dream jumps at the sound of a voice coming from the doorway. Sapnap is standing there, in a pair of basketball shorts and a hoodie, his hair still damp from the shower, looking at them with a curious expression on his face. Despite the fact that the two of them are just standing there, Dream suddenly feels as if they've been caught. Doing what, he isn't sure.

"Cooking for you two idiots," George says, pouring some more batter into the pan. "Even though neither of you deserve it."

"George is making us breakfast?" Sapnap asks, clearly incredulous. He comes to stand beside the two of them, peering at the stove inquisitively.

"Yeah," Dream confirms, suddenly painfully aware of the fact that he hasn't spoken yet. "Crepes."

"Pancakes," George immediately corrects. Sapnap's eyes dart between them again before finally landing on George.

"And you actually showered," he observes. "Will wonders never cease?"

George reaches out a hand in an attempt to shove Sapnap away from him, but Sapnap is already ducking out of the way, a triumphant expression on his face.

"You know, I think George is my new favorite roommate," he says, moving towards the fridge.

"*What?*" Dream exclaims, swinging around to look at him. "I cook for you all the time. And I buy all the food that's in this house!"

Sapnap shrugs, eyes surveying the fridge for a moment before he finally tugs out a carton of orange juice.

"First of all," he says, shutting the door as he moves to stand by the island in the center of the room. "Your mom buys all the groceries."

"With *my* money," Dream reminds.

"That's neither here nor there," Sapnap dismisses. "Point is, you've never made me--"

He gestures vaguely towards the stove with one hand.

“- whatever those are.”

“Pancakes,” George says, at the exact same time Dream says, “Crepes.”

Dream turns to look at him, and George meets his eyes, his mouth set in a firm line. Unable to help himself, Dream grins.

“In sync,” he points out.

“Shut up,” George replies, but even when he turns his face away, Dream can tell he’s smiling.

“Well, Patches is *my* favorite roommate. In case anyone cares.”

“Ok, how am I nobody’s favorite?” Dream demands. “I paid for the house!”

“You want it too much, Dream,” Sapnap says sagely. “Stop trying so hard.”

“Exactly,” George agrees, sliding another finished crepe onto the stack. “Stop trying so hard, Dream.”

Dream looks between them, mouth falling open. Sapnap just shoots him a grin, finally moving to retrieve a glass from the cabinet by the sink.

“You two are assholes,” Dream says finally. “Living together was a mistake.”

“We’re a joy to live with!” Sapnap insists, pouring himself a glass of orange juice and returning the carton to the fridge once more. “You’d be so lonely without us.”

“Lonely and sad,” George pipes up, nodding seriously. “And lame. We make you so much cooler, just by the mere fact of our existence.”

“So true,” Sapnap agrees. “Thank God for me and George, honestly.”

Dream shakes his head in disbelief, but even then, he can’t wipe the smile from his face.

It doesn’t take too much longer for George to use up the rest of his batter, and by the time he’s done, there’s quite a substantial pile of crepes beside him. Dream and Sapnap spend some time digging through the cabinets to try and determine exactly what they have for toppings, and end up returning with some peanut butter, a bag of sugar, and the jar of jam Dream had found the other night. George complains about their lack of lemons, and Dream promises to text his mom about it, which of course leads to a long string of “your mom” jokes, courtesy of both him and Sapnap (“No need to text her Dream, I’ll just tell her when I see her tonight.”, “Yeah, she’s gonna be *so* excited I’m finally in America.”, etc.)

It’s a bit chaotic, wrangling the plates and silverware and distributing all the food, but soon they’re all seated at the bar stools lined up against the island, bumping elbows with each other as they eat. Sapnap keeps on reaching across all of them, making a huge show of trying to grab the peanut butter, which George purposefully placed just beyond his grasp. Dream pours *way* too much sugar onto his first crepe, and when he tries to offload some onto George’s plate, George protests by attempting to drop a spoonful on jam onto Dream’s hair (which Dream dodges, very narrowly). At one point, Patches finally makes her way into the kitchen, and their entire meal is derailed by getting her breakfast, which George insists on being an active participant in, despite the fact that it really is a one person job. He even crouches by her bowl for a bit, watching happily as she munches away at her food.

Maybe Dream is gazing a bit too much, because at one point, Sapnap pokes him in the ribs, a knowing smirk on his face.

“Food’s gonna get cold,” he says innocently, pointing to Dream’s plate with his fork. Dream rolls his eyes, but tears his focus away nonetheless. George rejoins them a moment later, and only then does Dream think to turn to him, a small smile on his face.

“Thanks for breakfast, George,” he says. George looks at him, fork half-raised to his mouth.

“Uh, you’re welcome,” he says, seeming a bit caught off guard. Dream just nods, returning to his meal, but out of the corner of his eye, he can see George’s lips quirk upwards into a smile.

“Yeah, what are you making tomorrow?” Sapnap asks, leaning back in his seat to grin at him. George crumples up a napkin and throws it at his face.

The morning swiftly turns to afternoon, as the three of them spend far longer than necessary eating their food and discussing what the next few weeks will bring; the plans they’d held on the back burner for so long that were finally, *finally* coming to fruition. It hits Dream then, perhaps for the first time in full force, just how much there was to look forward to. It’s incredibly easy to get lost in the excitement of it all. He’s pretty sure at some point he agrees to help Sapnap rent out an entire go-cart track for a vlog idea.

George is a spitfire, rattling off idea after idea. Dream’s never seen him so motivated, and when he talks about his plans, they aren’t just concepts, but firm goals, the type of stuff he’d been mulling over for months, long before his visa had even been approved. His enthusiasm is contagious, and Dream catches himself smiling so much his cheeks begin to ache with it, watching as George punctuates his sentences with his hands in between bites of crepe.

At one point, he gets a glob of jam on the corner of his mouth and, without thinking, Dream reaches out and swipes it away easily with the pad of his thumb. George’s rhythm barely breaks, but Dream doesn’t think it’s his imagination that George begins to catch his eye more frequently after that, the casual touch lingering in the air between them long after Dream’s hand returns to his lap.

Sapnap ends up heading back up to his room before anyone can even try to rope him into cleaning, but honestly, Dream doesn’t really mind. He’s happy to do the dishes himself. If nothing else, it allows him a bit of space to shut off his brain, force all of his focus onto one, easy task.

What Dream doesn’t expect is, midway through him filling up the sink, George wordlessly crowding in by his side and picking up a dishrag. Dream stares at him, but he offers no explanation, and in the end, Dream doesn’t ask for one.

Yellow light streams in through the window, and the two of them stand there and do the dishes together. George bumps into Dream with his hip every so often, a soft smile on his face, and every time he does, Dream feels his center of gravity shift. The world shrinks to nothing but this: their kitchen, the gentle press of George against his side, and the smell of lemon soap, bubbling up in the sink, the hot water turning his hands pink. George doesn’t end up doing much washing, preferring instead to collect the bubbles in the palm of his hand and blow against them gently so they go wafting into the air. Laughter passes between them, easy and effortless. It feels like nothing else, like something brand new, and yet when George laughs, it’s as familiar as Dream’s own heartbeat.

It feels simple.

George is beside him, and Dream doesn't have to say anything at all.

A Protein Bar

It's a blisteringly hot Thursday afternoon, and Dream can't stop staring at the sun.

Well, it's either he looks at the sun or he looks at the pool, and weirdly enough, the sun seems like the safer option of the two at the moment. He supposes he could look at his phone too, but he's been trying to do that less, and besides, it seems like an unwise decision to have electronics, Sapnap, and any amount of water within five feet of each other. Dream has already been completely soaked by Sapnap's splashing, and he hasn't even gotten in the pool yet.

For no reason in particular. Obviously.

"Dream!"

Dream brings his gaze down, taking off his sunglasses and resting them on the top of his head. George is swimming over towards him, a proud grin on his face. At his approach, Dream tries his best to train his expression into something neutral. He isn't sure how well he succeeds.

Yeah, the sun was definitely less dangerous than this.

"Did you see that?" George asks, bringing his hands up and resting them on the stone tile.

"See what?" Dream asks, acting as if he wasn't just very purposefully trying to keep his eyes anywhere but on George. George, for his part, seems completely unaware. He just scoffs, bringing himself out of the pool further until he's resting on his elbows, the top of his torso just peeking out of the water.

Shoulders, Dream's brain smartly observes.

"I held my breath longer than Sapnap," he says. "Like, a whole ten seconds longer."

Dream grins. "That's impressive."

"HE'S LYING!" Sapnap shouts from the other end of the pool. "HE KEPT ON TRYING TO SABOTAGE ME, IT DOESN'T COUNT."

George rolls his eyes. "Sore loser."

"I HEARD THAT!" Sapnap retorts.

Dream laughs, sitting up further in his chair.

"Do it again," he suggests. "I'll time it."

"Ok," George agrees easily, lifting himself out of the water. "Lemme get my phone."

Dream nods, hastily averting his eyes to the ground. Of course, it's impossible to completely ignore George when he's right there in front of him, his swim trunks slung low on his hips, dark hair hanging down over his eyes in wet strands. The situation only becomes more drastic when, after rooting through his clothes for a bit, George returns to stand right in front of Dream, holding his phone in his outstretched hand. Dream stares up at him, hoping the flush rising on his cheeks just looks like a sunburn.

Chest, Dream's brain helpfully points out.

His inner monologue could win a Pulitzer, truly.

“Here,” George says, and only then does Dream realize he hasn’t actually moved yet.

“Oh, right,” he murmurs, finally accepting the phone. George nods, heading back towards the pool.

Even though George hasn’t been in Florida long, Dream can already tell how much the state agrees with him. His skin, which often grew pale and wane during the grey London winters, has taken on a flushed quality, the product of a couple sunburns that have gradually faded into a soft tan. He’d gotten a haircut right before he’d left the UK but by now it’s grown out a bit again, which can easily be marked by the sheer amount of times he has to shift it out of his eyes. He still looks like himself, obviously, but...different, somehow. *America George*, Dream has taken to referring to him as in his head. America George spent more time by the pool than Dream and Sapnap combined, basking in the sun for hours on end, which always left his freckles looking darker and more pronounced. America George wore shorts, something that Dream had *never* seen him in before, meaning he was walking around with his calves out a lot of the time which, yeah, whatever. Dream wasn’t a frazzled Victorian lady. He could handle seeing a bit of ankle.

More than any of that, though, America George seemed *happy*. It wasn’t like he’d been sad all the time before the move. More so that happiness for him used to come in sporadic bursts. Sometimes these bursts would be long, lasting for days or even weeks, but then, inevitably, the mood would dampen and the distance between them would seem unconquerable again. George had fallen into a lot of these funks and Dream certainly hadn’t been immune to them either. They’d always push through it, though. Find different ways to occupy their time, forgo streaming in favor of spending hours on call with Sapnap, unwilling to monitor themselves for an audience. Then, inevitably, George would find his groove again. He’d start streaming more, become a bit brighter, and the cycle would continue.

But now, there were no more bursts. No more peaks, no more valleys. Only a steady, even sort of contentment. The type of happiness that didn’t feel like it needed to be hoarded. The cycle had been broken, and Dream finally felt like he could breathe again.

Well, most of the time. He was having a bit of hard time breathing at the present moment, as he watches George slide back into the pool, back muscles emphasized for a brief second before disappearing beneath the water once more. Dream resists the urge to physically shake his head, desperate to get a handle on his own wandering thoughts.

“Ready?” George asks once he’s found a decent place to stand. Dream nods, holding the phone aloft in his grasp.

“I’ll count it down. Nick?”

“Ready!” Sapnap affirms, wading through the water to stand beside George. The two of them look like they are taking the whole thing incredibly seriously, so Dream supposes he should as well. Clearing his throat, he straightens up in his seat, fixing them with a firm stare.

“Gentlemen,” he begins solemnly. “In three...”

George shoves Sapnap with his shoulder. Sapnap moves to retaliate, and Dream clears his throat again, even more pointed this time. The two of them reluctantly straighten up, abandoning their squabble.

“Two...”

At that moment, George turns his attention to Dream once more, meeting his gaze. He's standing in the shallower end of the pool, but the water that would normally only reach Dream's midsection goes all the way up to George's chest, coming to rest just above his ribcage. His lips are parted in anticipation, and there's a bit of water gathering in the small divot of his cupid's bow. Dream's mouth goes dry at the sight. He thinks of that word again, that had entered into his mind on George's first morning in the house, when they were standing in the kitchen together.

Famished.

Dream takes a sharp breath in, suddenly remembering the task at hand.

"One," he finishes belatedly, hoping neither of them notice the delay. In a second, George and Sapnap are plunging underwater, bubbles appearing in their wake. Dream presses his thumb down to start the timer.

5 seconds tick by. No movement.

10 seconds. Dream catches sight of a ripple, beneath the surface, but no one emerges yet.

15 seconds. *Had George seen him staring before?* Had he realized how distracted Dream had become? How distracting *he* was?

20 seconds. Sapnap bursts out of the water, gasping for air. The moment he notices George is still under, he lets out a groan.

25 seconds. It wasn't like Dream had never noticed how attractive George was. In fact, he had been painfully aware of it for quite some time. But now, that awareness had taken on a brand new, very worrying dimension, one that seemed to be occupying a great deal of his brain space. Maybe he needed to buy horse-blinders, just to prevent himself from staring at his friend every time he was around him shirtless. Though, Dream supposes, that would make him a bit of a hypocrite. He walked around the house shirtless all the time, and George never seemed to have an issue with it.

30 seconds gone, and Dream is actually starting to get a bit worried now. He cranes his neck forward, trying to catch a glimpse of George. In the pool, Sapnap mutters something about cheating.

Then, at 31.47 seconds, George shoots upwards, water cresting around him. Immediately, he starts coughing, his breath coming harsh and wheezy. Dream stands from his chair, heading over to the edge of the pool.

"You good?" He asks, crouching down to try and get a better look at him. This was clearly a mistake, because at that moment, George pushes his wet hair back off his forehead and Dream legitimately feels like he's been electrocuted. Or shot. Whichever is more dramatic. George takes a few more deep breaths, clearly trying to steady himself, and then swims over until he's right below Dream. He looks up at him, eyelashes dotted with moisture.

"How'd I do?" He asks, ignoring Dream's question. It's so fucking cheesy, but for a moment, Dream actually can't speak. *Jesus*. Maybe horse-blinders weren't enough. He needed to figure out a way to exist within the same space as George and still remain semi-verbal, and fast, lest George catch on to just how much Dream appreciated the sight of him gazing up like that.

Dream forces his mind to re-focus, trying for a smile that he hopes looks totally normal and not at all crazy (which, to be fair, is exactly how he feels right now.)

"Eleven seconds," he says, casting a grin over at Sapnap. "It was eleven seconds longer."

George lets out a whoop, turning around to Sapnap with a smug expression on his face.

“Oh my God!” He exclaims, laughing brightly. “I’m totally cracked!”

“At what, holding your breath?” Sapnap retorts. “That’s just cause your mouth is so fucking huge. You can fit more air in it.”

Dream lets out a surprised cough, his brain immediately supplying him with a list of other things it thinks could fit in George’s mouth. Yeah, forget the horse-blinders. He needed to become a monk. That seemed like the only reasonable option left for him at this point.

“You’re *sooooo* mad,” George drawls, splashing a bit of water up at Sapnap’s face. “Get fucked, idiot. I won! You suck!”

“No way, we’re having a rematch,” Sapnap insists.

“Nope!” George says, popping the *-p* sound with a great deal of emphasis. “You’re trash, end of story.”

“Whoever can swim from one end of the pool to the other the fastest,” Sapnap suggests. George momentarily pauses his gloating and stares at him. Then, he turns around to look at Dream.

Dream sighs, letting his head fall forward in concession. They were gonna be out here for a while.

“I’ll time it,” he agrees. George beams at him, before turning his attention back to Sapnap.

“Get ready to lose again,” he says brightly. In a flurry of movement, he takes off towards the other end of the pool, Sapnap right on his tail.

That contest turns into another, and then another. Dream gets involved at one point, because of course he does, during the period of their competition where the two of them are shooting baskets in the small hoop attached to the pool. Sapnap is winning, which obviously won’t do, so George forces Dream to get in the water with them, claiming that he wants to use his height to his advantage.

“Alright, this is *obviously* cheating,” Sapnap protests. “Where is the referee? This is an outrage!”

“Shut up,” George retorts with a smile. “Dream, come on.”

Dream rolls his eyes, but obliges, sinking underwater beneath George and sliding his legs easily onto his shoulders. When he emerges, his hands firmly grasping George’s thighs, keeping him in place, he doesn’t think he imagines the small gasp that passes George’s lips. Dream bites back a grin.

Maybe he also wanted to show off a bit. Sue him.

Of course, it ends up biting him in the ass, because Dream’s life has never been fair or easy. George’s thighs feel soft and inviting under his hands, and it’s all Dream can do to keep his breathing steady as George tries to sink another basket. It takes a bit, but soon enough he gets a decent shot in and the ball goes sinking through the hoop. Sapnap grumbles about favoritism as he goes to retrieve it. George lets out a loud cheer, tilting his head down to meet Dream’s eyes.

“Did you see that?” He asks. The sun casts a halo behind his hair, turning the edges hazy and golden. “I’m awesome!”

“Yeah, and you did it all on your own too, which is what makes it really impressive,” Dream says with a smirk. George rolls his eyes, flicking him lightly on the side of his head.

“Shut up,” he mutters. For a moment, the two of them stay there, as Dream becomes increasingly aware of the heat radiating off of George’s body, engulfing him completely. As much as Dream liked when George looked up at him, he also *really* liked having to look at up George. Slowly, George’s hands come down and tangle in Dream’s hair, making it stand up at odd angles. His fingers just barely ghost along Dream’s scalp, and yet Dream still feels a shiver run up his spine at the touch, a stark departure from the beating warmth of the sun on his back. Once George decides his hair has been sufficiently messed with, he pulls back, admiring his handiwork.

“You look silly like this,” he says with a grin. Dream wants to make a joke, keep the mood between them light, but some reason, his brain chooses that moment to be completely and devastatingly honest. Figures.

“You look hot like this,” he murmurs. George’s expression slackens, his mouth closing abruptly. *Shit*. Dream’s brain scrambles for something to say, but then, because his suffering is eternal, something much, much worse happens.

George’s thighs tighten around him, just barely, and Dream’s mind goes blank.

In the seconds he’s not paying attention, his grip slips and they both go crashing backwards into the water.

When he emerges a moment later, sputtering and soaking wet, George is looking at him with a puzzled expression on his face. He doesn’t seem at all disrupted by the fall, in fact, he has an eerie sort of calmness about him. It makes Dream very, very nervous.

“Sorry!” He says with a chuckle. “Must’ve slipped.”

Before George even has the chance to respond, he’s already swimming over to the steps leading out of the pool. Even with his back turned, he can feel the way George’s gaze lingers on him.

They stay outside for another hour or so, and eventually George tires of contests, choosing instead to come join Dream at the pool chairs. Sapnap remains in the water, but he’s grabbed one of the massive floaties, the one shaped like an ice cream cone, and is relaxing back on it lazily, his head tilted up towards the sun. At this point, Dream’s pretty sure he’s fallen asleep.

At the sound of a shutter being clicked, Dream turns his head. George is smiling at him sheepishly, phone in hand.

“Whoops,” he says. “Must’ve slipped.”

Dream scoffs, half-heartedly reaching a hand up and trying to grab the phone from him. George dodges his grasp easily, sitting down in the chair beside Dream with a pleased grin on his face.

“Delete it,” Dream says, just for the sake of it.

If he was being honest, he didn’t actually care that George had pictures of him on his phone. It had started happening only a couple days after he’d moved in. Dream would be in the middle of some mundane task, like cooking or lifting weights in the gym, and George would emerge out of nowhere and snap a picture of him. When Dream had asked him why he’d taken up this habit, George had said ‘for leverage,’ which didn’t really make much sense if you asked Dream. It’s not

like any of the pictures were particularly unflattering. In fact, some of the ones George had shown him were...kind of good, actually, so the whole 'leverage' excuse didn't exactly add up. Still, he'd stopped questioning it. He didn't want George to think he was actually uncomfortable with having his picture taken.

Because, if he was being *really* honest, a part of him kind of liked it. Dream was a performer at heart, in a lot of ways. He liked putting on a show, especially when he thought that George was watching him, and that maybe, he liked what he saw.

Not that he'd ever admit that. That was one step too close to offering George a picture of himself to put in a locket or something. It was much easier to pretend it was just another game between them, a new way they could tease each other. Besides, Dream had his fair share of pictures of George on his phone too.

Ok, probably more than his fair share.

"No," George dismisses breezily. "I'm gonna post it on Twitter."

That gets Dream's attention.

"What?" He scoffs. "No, you aren't."

"I could," George says with a shrug. "Not like your face is a secret anymore."

"Yeah, but my bare chest still is!" Dream retorts, feeling a bit scandalized.

"Oh, this is great!" George says, perking up. "You did a face reveal, now you can do a nipple reveal. On my account, obviously."

"Oh my God," Dream groans. "You are such an idiot."

George laughs. "Maybe I can charge people."

"George, you are not...managing my Only Fans," Dream says with a grimace.

"It's *one* shirtless picture, Dream," George says drily. "You'd need a lot more than that for an Only Fans."

Dream chokes on nothing, which only makes George laugh harder, the evil bastard. He shakes his head, crossing his arms in front of his chest a bit self-consciously. It's only then that he realizes George still has the photo pulled up on his phone. He hasn't stopped looking at it. *Huh*. Interesting.

Dream leans in close across the gap between their chairs, trying to get a better look at the picture. Apparently, George decides that this is one he doesn't want to share, so he shuts off his phone and places it down beside him with a blank expression on his face. Dream raises an eyebrow.

"What? That one's just for your private collection?" He asks teasingly. "Maybe you *don't* wanna share it."

George shoots him an incredulous look, but Dream's already on a roll now. He'd been given an inch, and he was determined to see how far he could run with it.

"Maybe you want that one all to yourself," he says with a cocky grin. George *tsks*, as if Dream has just done something particularly annoying. It *thrills* him. There were few things Dream loved more than getting under George's skin. George was normally a pretty put together person, and Dream

took a great deal of pride in his ability to occasionally take him apart.

“Shut up,” is all he says. Dream absolutely had the upper-hand now, *thank God*, and he was gonna milk it for all it’s worth, eager to recover some of the dignity he’d lost in the pool.

“Besides, what would Twitter think?” He asks with a dramatic gasp. As if on instinct, George rolls his eyes. “You, posting a shirtless picture of me?”

George stares at him, looking entirely unimpressed.

“You’re right, Dream. Then people on the internet might think we’re dating,” he deadpans. “That’d be crazy.”

“Ok, that’s not-” Dream begins hastily, letting out a surprised laugh. “You *know* what I mean.”

“No, really. That’d be *so* insane. Can you imagine?” George continues, a self-satisfied grin appearing on his face. “People thinking the two of us are *together*? Oh my God. My brain would *literally* explode.”

“*Geooorge*,” Dream whines, letting his head fall back. So much for the upper-hand.

“Surely no one has thought of this before,” George says, furrowing his brow. “Because nothing you’ve ever done would’ve given anyone the impression that you were, I don’t know, a little bit in love with me or something-”

“Ok!” Dream says, standing suddenly. “I’m going inside!”

Hastily, he grabs his towel, ignoring George as he makes a bee-line for the sliding glass door leading into their living room.

“We should come up with a name for it!” George calls after him, sounding incredibly pleased with himself. Without turning around, Dream flips him off. George’s laughter follows him all the way back into the house.

After a morning spent goofing off, Dream ends up falling into a bit of a editing hole. It’s not like he intends to, but late morning turns into afternoon which turns into evening, and before he knows it, it’s nearing 1am and he’s still staring at his computer, eyes glazing over as he makes tiny adjustments to the video open in front of him.

Obviously, this was nothing new. Dream operated like this sometimes, driving his body to its limit for days on end only to collapse, sleep for 36 hours or so, and then do it all over again a few days later. Not the healthiest mode of operation, to be sure, but he’d grown so used to it now that it felt like a difficult pattern to break out of.

Besides, this was the type of behavior his entire career had been built off of. Changing it now felt risky. What if he accidentally ended up trading in quality for a better sleep schedule? People would surely notice, and that wasn’t an option as far as he was concerned. He couldn’t flatten out, and he certainly couldn’t get worse. The only way forward was for him to get better, to top the last thing he’d done and top it in a way that made people wanna stick around to see what he was gonna come up with next.

There was a book he’d read at one point, about how success was a pyramid, or a ladder, maybe. He couldn’t quite remember the metaphor. Either way, it seemed to him that whenever he reached the

top of the pyramid, or his hand finally grasped the last rung of the ladder, he would look up to find that there was still a great deal of climbing left ahead of him. This wasn't daunting, exactly, but it did make him wonder where the end actually was. When he would truly peak.

He remembers another story, about a bunch of people who built a tower so tall, God decided to come down and knock it all over, just to punish them. Dream decides not to pay that story much mind. He figures he'll take his chances.

Suddenly, Dream's door opens, pulling him out of his thoughts. He doesn't even need to look over to see who is it. Only one person in the house entered without knocking. Well, two, if you counted Patches.

Then, something small and rectangular smacks against the side of his face. Dream blinks in surprise, turning to the door where George is standing, his hand still outstretched in front of him.

"Catch," he says, grinning at Dream. He's changed into a pair of black sweats and a light blue t-shirt, the one he'd bought with Sapnap at the mall a few days ago. Dream recognizes it immediately; for some reason, George had texted him numerous pictures, asking for Dream's opinion before he finally decided to buy it.

Dream's glad he did. It looks nice on him.

"Little late for that," Dream points out, watching as George steps further into the room and shuts the door behind him. He glances down at his lap, where the object had landed. "Uh, what is this?"

George comes to sit on Dream's bed behind his chair, and Dream swivels around to face him, taking his headphones off and letting them hang around his neck. This had become George's preferred spot in the house. Over the couch, over the pool, even over his own bed. More than half the time that Dream was in his room, George was there too, spending time with Patches, scrolling through TikTok, doing his best to keep Dream distracted so he'd have someone to hang out with, or simply falling asleep, napping on Dream's bed for hours on end. He'd never spent the night though, at least not fully. And Dream certainly hadn't come up with a good enough excuse to ask him to stay.

"It's a protein bar," George says. "Duh."

Dream picks up the bar and examines it. He hadn't bothered to turn on any lights in his room, so he has to make out the words written on it by the soft, blue glow of his computer screen.

"*Peanut Butter Crunch*," he reads, bringing his eyes up to meet George's gaze once more. "Huh."

"Huh?" George echoes.

"Yeah, did you...want me to try this?" He asks, clearly confused. "I mean, I don't see what's so special about--"

"Dream," George interrupts, a patient smile on his face. "You haven't eaten since breakfast."

Dream frowns at him. No, that couldn't be right. He'd gotten up in the morning, he'd made omelettes for everyone, they'd gone out to the pool, and then -

Oh my God. Dream hadn't eaten since breakfast.

"Fuck," he swears, immediately tearing into the wrapper with his teeth. A moment after his brain registers it, his body catches up with him. God, he was *starving*. And achy, too. And his head hurt.

When was the last time he drank water?

“Yeah, idiot,” George says, his tone still soft. “You’re wasting away in here like some sickly, orphan child. Very *Oliver Twist* of you.”

Dream scoffs, taking a greedy bite of the bar. “Your references are so British.”

He scarfs down the whole thing in seconds, which leaves him feeling a bit queasy. It would take his stomach a moment to digest the food, after hours with no sustenance. Without thinking, he brings his right hand up and starts kneading at it. His wrist and fingers were killing him, all the repetitive motion of his mouse and keyboard usage finally setting in.

“What are you doing?” George asks, adjusting himself so he’s sitting cross-legged on edge of the bed.

“My hand’s cramping,” Dream says, nodding towards it with his chin. “I haven’t been wearing my compression gloves enough, so it’s bothering me a bit.”

George is watching him very intently now. Well, not watching *him*, exactly, but watching his hands. He seems incredibly focused on them, eyes tracking the movement of Dream’s thumb as it makes even circles into the flesh his palm. Dream has to bite back a laugh when he realizes what it reminds him of.

Patches, when she zeroes in on a toy Dream is dangling in front of her. That’s what George looks like right now.

Then, much to Dream’s surprise, he reaches a hand out into the space between them. Dream pauses his movement, staring at him curiously.

“Let me,” George says plainly. Dream doesn’t move, just looks at him, a confused expression on his face. George huffs, placing his hand on the arm of Dream’s chair and tugging him closer, bumping their knees together. “Your hand. Give it to me.”

Maybe Dream is hearing him wrong. Or there’s some sort of joke he’s not picking up on. Surely George isn’t offering what he *thinks* he’s offering.

“Now!” George demands. Dream jumps slightly and finally sticks his hand out, letting George take it in his own. As soon as he does, Dream almost recoils in surprise.

“God,” he chuckles, “your hands are freezing.”

“Yeah, well, you keep this house freezing,” George quips, still holding Dream’s hand palm-up in his own. He seems stiff all of a sudden, his posture far less relaxed than it was a moment ago.

“I keep this house *comfortable*,” Dream corrects. “It’s the ideal temperature in here.”

“For you, maybe,” George mutters. “You’re like a walking furnace.”

“Aw, George,” Dream coos. “Are you calling me hot?”

George digs his thumb nail sharply into the skin of Dream’s palm. Dream yelps, moving to tug his hand away, but George tightens his grip, keeping it there.

“Ow!” Dream protests.

“Behave,” George says firmly. Dream raises an eyebrow, mentally cycling through about five

potential responses before he finally settles on one that feels acceptable to say.

“You’re really bossy, you know that?” He mutters, scooching his chair even closer to the bed, letting his arm fall slack. George seems entirely unbothered by the accusation.

“Only when you’re being annoying,” he responds, a wry smile on his lips. “Which is always.”

“You’re the one who came into *my* room,” Dream points out. “Did you miss me too much, is that it? Couldn’t stand to be apart for more than a couple of hours?”

“No,” George replies easily. “Just wanted to make sure you hadn’t died in here. Cats eat corpses, you know.”

Dream wrinkles his nose in disgust.

“Patches would never eat me,” he insists. “She loves me too much.”

“Hm, not as much as she loves me,” George says with a shrug. Dream opens his mouth to respond, but before he can, George finally relaxes his hand, bringing his fingers up and curling them gently around Dream’s palm. Whatever response Dream was planning on giving is swiftly lost.

George seems to be examining Dream’s hand as if it’s a particularly difficult set of code, furrowing his brow and tensing his fingers a bit, watching to see how he responds. Dream doesn’t say anything, just sits there and allows George to take the lead. George’s head remains bent slightly, his eyes obscured, but even then Dream can see some movement in his jaw, a purposeful clenching and unclenching that indicates a level of internal debate. Immediately, Dream wants to soothe him, but he isn’t even sure what he would say. In all their time spent together, George had never touched him this deliberately, at least not since his first night in the house. Touches between them were often casual, fleeting; a brush of shoulders, hands bumping together clumsily, the shifting of bodies to get more comfortable on the couch. Nothing that had been approached with such gravity, such deliberation.

Then, with his thumb, George begins making small, firm circles in the center of Dream’s palm, mimicking the motion Dream was doing before. Despite the fact that the movement is the same, it feels completely different - George’s fingers are smaller, and more cautious, as if he’s worried about pushing too hard, or doing the wrong thing.

He’s nervous, Dream realizes all at once. Though he can’t imagine why, George’s reaction is undeniable. Unconsciously, a small smile rises to Dream’s lips.

He lets his hand fall open completely, a silent invitation. Even in such a relatively unimportant context, he wants George to know that he trusts him completely. George doesn’t react, but after a moment, the circle he’s making with his thumb begins to grow wider.

“What were you working on?” George asks, his voice quiet. The only sound in the room is coming from the dull hum of Dream’s AC, so he doesn’t have to speak very loud to be heard.

“The video we filmed on Wednesday,” Dream says, unsure of where to put his eyes. He feels a bit strange, just sitting there and watching the top of George’s head, but at the same time, he’s incredibly reluctant to tear his gaze away. Every minute detail of George continued to be endlessly fascinating to him, despite the fact that being near him no longer felt like a novelty. George huffs out a small laugh.

“You’re gonna get that one posted before mine even though we filmed it ages ago,” he remarks. Dream scoffs.

“Yeah, because you refuse to actually-”

“-sit down and edit it, George, come on, don't be an idiot,” George interrupts, his tone high and mocking. Dream gapes at him, and when George finally looks up to meet his eyes, his expression is bright with mirth.

“I wasn't gonna say that,” Dream lies.

“Yes, you were,” George counters easily, making a small, disappointed noise in the back of his throat. “So predictable, Dream.”

Dream's mouth opens and closes a few times, in what he assumes is a pretty accurate imitation of a fish. George actually giggles at the sight.

“And you always have such a way with words,” he quips sarcastically. “You're so...”

He trails off, furrowing his brow in frustration.

“What am I thinking of?” He inquires, perhaps more to himself than to Dream. “What's the word? Artful?”

Dream grins, relishing the irony of the situation.

“Articulate,” he supplies, allowing only a bit of smugness to enter into his tone.

“That,” George confirms with a nod, unperturbed by Dream's cockiness. “So articulate, Dream.”

Dream shakes his head with laughter. “I *am* articulate, you're very correct. Thank you for the compliment, George.”

“I was kidding, idiot,” he says, fixing him with a dry look. Dream bites the inside of his cheek, suppressing a smile. At that moment, somewhere on the floor below them, Dream hears a muffled shout, followed by a loud thumping noise. He raises his eyebrows in surprise.

“Is that-?” He begins.

“Sapnap streaming Valo,” George confirms, rolling his eyes. “Maybe he finally realized how trash he is and decided to rage-quit, who knows.”

Another shout, followed by the unmistakable sound of a chair falling over. Despite all the money they had invested in noise canceling equipment, Sapnap's emotions were clearly too powerful to contain. George looks over at the door, then back at Dream, and in the same breath, the two of them burst out laughing. George bends forward slightly, and Dream does too, so they almost end up knocking foreheads, which only makes them laugh harder. Dream is so caught up in it, he doesn't even notice that George's fingers have begun kneading gently at his thumb. The moment he's able to catch his breath, and the laughter subsides, all his focus narrows to the small point of contact between them. It sends a swift rush of blood to his head, so sudden it leaves his ears ringing.

There's no more sound from Sapnap's room, and the silence that follows in its absence becomes all the more tangible, sitting in the room with them like a physical presence. Dream shifts in his seat, bringing one knee up and resting his chin on it. Conversation had been flowing so easily before, why did his tongue now feel like it had turned to lead in his mouth?

George's expression is calm as his eyes return to Dream's hand once again. The silence that weighs

so heavily on Dream seems to slide right off of him.

“You know, your hands were the first part of you that I saw,” he remarks, as casual as anything. “Do you remember that?”

“Really?” Dream asks.

“Yeah, you sent me a Snapchat,” George recalls. “You were giving me a thumbs up.”

“God, that’s corny,” Dream says, feeling a bit embarrassed on behalf of his younger self. He doesn’t even remember the photo itself, but he’s sure that at the time it had felt like a huge deal, to be sharing *any* part of himself like that. He’d probably posed his hand right in front of his old set-up too. Tried to show off the new keyboard he’d just bought, one of the first big purchases he’d made with his own money. It all seems so silly in hindsight, but he supposes that’s just what being a kid was like. Every tiny show of independence felt monumental. Every small step forward felt massive.

“You *were* corny,” George laughs. “You were, like, a parody of yourself. So earnest.”

“*What?*” Dream demands. “That doesn’t even make sense.”

“Sure it does,” George says with a shrug. The fingers that were working on Dream’s thumb move to the next finger. Dream feels a breath catch in his throat. “I was like, who is this kid who tries so hard at everything? For a while I thought it was a bit you were doing, but then I realized you really were just like that.”

“What, a try-hard?” Dream prompts, a small grin on his face. George shrugs again, but there’s a small pinch to his expression now, creasing the space between his brows.

“Not really,” he says. “Or, I guess that’s what I thought at first.”

“And what do you think now?”

George looks up in surprise at the question, his fingers stilling for a moment.

“I just think you’re a person who cares a lot,” he finally says. The air between them contracts, expands. The silence that was looming so large dissipates back into nothingness. Dream smiles at him, cocking his head to the side slightly.

“You care too,” he says. “You’re just better at hiding it.”

George smiles ruefully.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he murmurs, looking at Dream like they’re sharing the same inside joke. It doesn’t seem out of place; they so often were.

“Sure I do,” Dream says, playing along. “You wanna know *how* I know?”

George grins. “How?”

“Cause I know you,” Dream says, which earns him a soft, incredulous laugh. “I do! Even when you don’t come right out and say stuff. I can read between the lines. Pick up on your subliminal messages.”

“Ok,” George nods thoughtfully. “Then what am I thinking of right now?”

Dream narrows his eyes, squinting at George like he's a specimen to be studied. Another laugh rises to his lips, but George does a better job of keeping it at bay this time, the only sign of his amusement coming from a slight tremor in his shoulders. Dream takes another moment for dramatic effect, before he leans back in his seat, satisfied with his findings.

"You're thinking about how good I am at Minecraft," he says. George's mouth falls open. "And! And...how attractive I am. And how much you love me."

George's resolve finally crumbles, his face blooming with laughter. Dream thinks he could spend the rest of his life dedicated to this, training in the ancient and sacred art of getting George to laugh like that. In that moment, he can't think of a single occupation more worthwhile.

"Yes, Dream, that's it exactly," George says, his tone laden with sarcasm. "I spend all my time thinking about how great you are at *Minecraft*. Obviously."

"I knew it!" Dream exclaims. "See? I know you so well."

"Here, let me try," George says, leaning in and mirroring Dream's previous position. Dream ducks down as well, bringing their foreheads closer together, his lips pressed together in a smile.

"Getting anything?" Dream prompts, his voice low and conspiratorial.

"I'm trying, but all I'm hearing is this weird, staticky noise," George says, frowning. "Almost like you have no thoughts, and your head is completely empty."

Dream inhales through his teeth, nodding steadily.

"I should probably get that checked out," he says. "It sounds like that could potentially be a problem for me."

"It's too late," George says solemnly, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. You're beyond help. I would let your friends and family know, but they don't care and wouldn't miss you. Also, you have no friends."

"You're an idiot," Dream chuckles, leaning back in his chair again. George grins proudly, and only then does Dream realize their hands are still linked together, George's fingers wrapped loosely around his own like the open half of a parentheses. Immediately, Dream wants to point it out, but he holds his tongue, allowing George to return his focus to it naturally. Eventually, he does, and his fingers begin to knead gently at Dream's knuckles, his tendons, even the small dent in his pinkie (a minor deformity he'd gained after years of holding his phone in the exact same position.) At this point, Dream's almost positive some part of George is enjoying it just as much as he is. He seems to find some genuine interest in the task, mapping out the lines and curves of Dream's hand. Or maybe, he's just that bored.

"Then what are you?" Dream asks after a moment. George barely glances up at him, a confused tilt to his expression.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if I have no friends," Dream continues. "What does that make you?"

George cocks an eyebrow, his eyes lingering on Dream for a moment longer before dropping again.

"I don't know. Ask you mom," he says. "She's the one who pays me to be here."

Dream lets out a surprised laugh. "Does she now?"

George looks up at him, a smirk on his face.

"Oh yeah," he says, waggling his eyebrows. "She pays me *really* well."

"*What?*" Dream exclaims. "I don't even know who that's more offensive towards. Do people usually pay you, George?"

George's smirk only widens. "I don't know. Are you asking for my price?"

"Oh, come on," Dream huffs, ducking his head down. Even in the low light of the room, he's positive George can see the flush rising on his face, spreading until it turns the tips of his ears a bright, embarrassed pink. He's always been an easy blusher.

"You couldn't afford me anyway," George says with a shrug, which prompts Dream to look up at him again. "I'm expensive."

"I paid for the house we're sitting in right now," Dream says, before his brain can even think to point out how fucking absurd it that they're having this conversation in the first place. George leans in again, crowding into Dream's orbit, forcing his atmosphere to change, just like always. Dream looks at him, and the air around them grows thin. He's almost dizzy with it.

"*Very* expensive," he emphasizes. Dream raises an eyebrow. Despite how frigid George's hand felt at first, the point of contact between them now feels scalding.

"Must be worth it then," he murmurs. Like blood pressed out of a wound, a smile grows slow and steady across George's face. *Fucking hell*. This was dangerous.

"Must be," he agrees, leaning back again, no indication on his face that the conversation that had just passed between them was anything but completely ordinary. Dream feels scrubbed raw, and George looks as if they'd just been having a nice chat about the weather. *What the hell?*

Maybe, it *was* ordinary, and that was the problem. They'd always spoken to each other like this, sometimes alone, sometimes in front of others, and it'd never struck Dream as odd before. In fact, it didn't even seem all that odd now. It just felt...weightier. Less easy to brush off, the way it lingered in the back of his teeth like a particularly strong taste. Perhaps that had something to do with the fact that George was still making diligent work on Dream's hand, his fingers moving down now to press at the seam of Dream's wrist, where his veins shown stark and blue beneath his skin.

"Did you see that TikTok I sent you?" George asks.

Christ. Dream was gonna get whiplash.

"Uh, which one?" He asks, his voice coming out a bit hoarse. George sighs dramatically, putting on a great show of tugging out his phone from his sweatpants pocket. It takes a moment, but soon the video loads on screen.

It's of a raccoon, using its strange, human-like hands to pick up blueberries and pop them into its mouth. The videos plays a few times, while George smiles down at the screen. Then, he looks up at Dream, a delighted expression on his face.

"It eats like a person!" He says, as if he's just stumbled upon some great hidden secret of the universe. "That's epic!"

Dream stares at him for a moment, completely baffled. Then, because the whole thing is so fucking ridiculous, he starts to laugh, a high-pitched, wheezing noise that prompts George to look at him with an expression of surprised concern on his face.

This was his life now. One minute George was setting him on fire, the next he was showing him dumb animal videos. Whatever sort of control Dream thought he had over his own life had been swiftly obliterated the moment George set foot on U.S. soil. Frankly, he should've seen it coming.

"Ok, Dream, it wasn't *that* funny," George mutters, eyeing him warily.

"It is, though," Dream gasps after a moment, still struggling to speak. "It's really, really funny."

George continues to watch him, bemused, as Dream struggles to get a hold of himself. When he finally does, his eyes are cloudy with tears.

"God," George says faintly. "You're, like, unhinged."

Dream grins, bringing up his free hand and wiping at his eyes.

"Yeah, maybe," he concedes. Perhaps that was an easier explanation than the truth of what was actually going on inside his head. Some mixture of exhaustion, hunger and the way George's skin felt against his own had turned his brain to mush and then reshaped it in the image of George's hands. He'd been unmade by him, then brought back together just as quickly, over and over and over again, though none of it left him feeling incomplete or fractured. In fact, Dream felt entirely whole.

Without thinking, his hand relaxes slightly, fingers brushing against the sloping peaks of George's knuckles. His skin is undeniably warmer now, closer to the internal temperature Dream usually ran at. The lines between them seemed more blurred than ever. When George opens his mouth to speak, Dream half-expects his own voice to come out.

"It is...better?" He asks, sounding unsure. Dream nods.

"Much better," he assures honestly. But while the stiffness in his hand had certainly lessened, he was much more focused on the way the rest of his body had responded to George's touch. His blood had fled to all the wrong places, leaving his head feeling fragile and buzzy, as if was held to the rest of him by a string. Behind him, his computer silently falls asleep, plunging the room into a more complete darkness, the only light now coming from the lava lamp positioned on his bedside table, emitting a soft, purple glow. Though his AC is doing its best to keep the heat at bay, Dream can already tell the type of night it is outside, humidity settling thick and damp over the world like a press of lips, like the hot breath of a mouth against skin.

"Good," George responds, flopping Dream's hand around by the wrist. "I'm not finished with these yet. Can't have your hands breaking in the middle of editing my next video."

"Is that all I am to you?" Dream asks, chuckling softly. "A pair of hands?"

George's expression ripples, or at least that's what it looks like in the dim light. Dream catches the way his eyebrows raise, tipping back into that same dangerous territory they had only narrowly escaped from before. Dream feels a low tug in his belly, as if someone has reached in and squeezed his insides like an overripe fruit.

This time, if they venture there, Dream isn't sure he'll be able to find his way back out.

Then, George lets out a soft laugh, as if suddenly recalling an old joke. Dream cocks his head to the

side, confused, which George picks up on immediately. A smile Dream would almost think to describe as bashful rises to his lips.

“I mean, for a while your hands *were* the only part of you I saw,” he murmurs. “It’s like the rest of you just...grew out of them.”

“Huh,” Dream mutters. “I guess that’s true. Weird.”

George hums in agreement. They still haven’t disconnected from each other, but George ends up moving his own hand, fingers slowly unfurling. Dream remains pliant, allowing George to press his palm flat up against his own like a reflection, like a mirror. It’s impossible not to notice how his hand eclipses George’s. Again, his blood shifts, crawling lower, settling like a dog somewhere in the hollow of his stomach.

“Before you saw me,” Dream begins. “What did I look like?”

George shrugs, eyes drifting.

“Honestly? I don’t really remember,” he says. “It’s like, when I actually saw you it just made so much sense in my head. Like...yeah, that’s Dream.”

Dream grins. “So you always knew I’d be handsome?”

“Fuck off,” George scoffs. “No, but just looking at your hands I knew...”

He trails off, but it’s too late, Dream is already leaning in close, desperate to chase the end of that sentence.

“Knew what, George?” He prompts, his teeth glinting.

George’s eyes narrow, but it’s clear he understands Dream isn’t gonna let this go. He sighs.

“That the rest of you would probably match them. Cause they were, you know,” George says, putting a shrug where the rest of his words should be. Dream raises his eyebrows, a silent request for more. George presses his tongue against the inside of teeth, looking annoyed. “Big.”

He grimaces, as if the single word took a great deal of effort to say. Dream stares at him for a moment, the word ricocheting around in his head, played and then rewound again. Not even a compliment, necessarily, and yet Dream can feel his entire body grow towards it, the heat inside of him steadily expanding. His reaction was a bit embarrassing, even he could admit that, but so was everything when it came to George. *Big*.

Ok. He could work with that.

“Oh, well in that case, they *definitely* match the rest of me,” he says, a cloying grin on his face. George’s eyes go huge, and then abruptly dart away. When they find Dream again, he’s glaring at him.

“Yeah, they match your huge fucking ego,” he retorts.

“George,” Dream presses, his voice dropping lower into his chest. “C’mon.”

George’s jaw tightens, a sure sign of his frustration. Whatever, Dream would take it. Any reaction he could get out of George felt like a victory.

“You’re dumb,” he states plainly, refusing to relinquish any ground.

“There are other words you’ve used to describe me before,” Dream says, keeping his voice measured. “You remember that?”

George’s fingers curl, and Dream chases them, lacing their hands together. Immediately, George’s nails find purchase in his skin, soft pricks of pain that make Dream’s head spin.

“Nope,” he says, stubbornness sharpening his voice to a point.

“Really?” Dream frowns. “I can remind you, if your memory is *that* bad.”

The fingers tighten even more, George’s nails leaving small half-moon indents in his skin. Dream liked the gentleness that George’s touch held before but *this*. He liked this too.

“Don’t,” George cautions.

“Why not?” Dream asks, still poking, still unwillingly to let George get off so easily. “It’s nothing to be embarrassed about. I compliment you all the time.”

George rolls his eyes. “Yeah, sure.”

Dream looks at him for a moment, genuinely taken aback.

“What, do you think I’m not being serious or something?” He asks, surprise evident. “I always mean it when I compliment you, George.”

George stares at him, his mouth still drawn in a tense line, before finally, he relaxes, his expression softening.

“Yeah, I know,” he says, a bit quieter this time. “Simp.”

“I’m reclaiming that title,” Dream says with a grin. “I’ll own it proudly.”

George laughs, a dusty flush rising to his cheeks that can be seen even in the dull, murky light of Dream’s room.

“Ok, *simp*,” he says. “Come make me dinner then.”

Dream shakes his head, huffing out a laugh. Slowly, he untangles their hands. The break in contact turns his skin cold.

“No, George, I need to finish this,” he says, gesturing back in the direction of his computer.

“Don’t care, also I didn’t ask,” George says without missing a beat. “Come on. I want pasta.”

“You can make yourself pasta!” Dream insists. “Boil water. Throw the pasta in it. Easy.”

“Hm, I don’t want to,” George retorts. “I want *you* to make me pasta, and I want to watch.”

“It’s 1am, George,” Dream points out. “And I wanna get this done, and then sleep.”

“No,” George says. Dream raises his eyebrows.

“What do you mean no?”

“I mean, no,” George repeats. “Because you’re gonna spend another five hours doing this, and then it’ll be morning, and then you’ll sleep all day which is *boring*—”

"You sleep all the time!" Dream interjects.

"*And then* you won't be up to make me breakfast either," George continues. "Which would be very messed up."

"Oh yeah, *so* messed up," Dream scoffs. "George, come on, I need to-"

"Dream."

Dream stills, surprised by George's tone. It's firm, more authoritative than Dream was used to hearing, but there's something buried deeper in it, something Dream is having a harder time pinning down. George looks at him, his expression betraying nothing.

"Food," he says plainly. "Then sleep."

Dream wants to push. It wouldn't be hard. George would never try to squeeze any real sort of argument out of this. If Dream asked, he's sure the subject would drop.

Still. He *was* hungry.

"We do have some pesto in the fridge," he murmurs. George grins, clearly pleased to be getting his way yet again. Perhaps that should bother Dream a bit more, how easily he acquiesces, but for some reason, the compliance never felt like weakness. Trying to make George happy felt like the most natural thing in the world. It was muscle memory, at this point.

"And chicken," George reminds. "Protein is important, Dream. You work out, you should know these things."

Dream rolls his eyes. "Yes, alright. Come on, before I change my mind."

George hops up from the bed easily, as Dream spins around in his chair once more, triple-checking that he's actually saved the file left open on his screen. George lingers by the door while he waits, stocking feet tracing small patterns in the hardwood. When Dream finally moves to stand, the wrapper in his lap falls to the ground. He glances down at it for a moment, then back at George, who is watching him curiously.

"Uh, thank you for that," Dream says, his voice soft. "And for, you know."

He flexes his hand, as if to prove it's regained its better functions. George nods, squirming a bit where he stands. His eyes dart away again, gazing at the wall like it suddenly holds some particular interest to him.

"Sure," he says, looking as if there's more hidden underneath the curve of his tongue, yet to be uncovered. Then, he clears his throat, eyes flitting back to Dream. "Hurry up, I'm hungry."

With that, he opens Dream's door and heads out into the hall. Dream stands there for a moment, listening as George's footsteps trace their way down the stairs.

Almost immediately, that familiar pressure in his brain reemerges, that urgency, telling him to sit back down, abstain, not give himself so much leeway. It was about more than just work, of course. Dream could feel them now, those simmering desires moving beneath his skin, pressing themselves up against the fragile barrier he had constructed between himself and the things he wanted. It was no small feat. Dream had been wading through this current for far longer than he'd willingly admit, and he'd kept it at bay, even as the tide had grown more pressing. Now, it felt less and less like an act of strength and more like he was delaying the inevitable, patching cracks that

were destined to re-form. He wasn't sure how much longer he could keep himself from drowning.

Downstairs, muffled by distance, Dream can hear the sound of the fridge door open. In the stillness of his room, he exhales, and finally, moves to follow George.

Strawberry Milkshake

What it all builds up to is this:

It's evening, sometime after 6 o'clock, though the world outside offers little indication of this fact. The sky has been dark and cloudy all day, making time feel wonky and strange, entire hours passing in what feels like mere minutes. The forecasted storm has finally arrived, the first proper one George has seen, and it's a beast to be reckoned with. Trees bent at odd angles by ripping winds, raindrops like bullets beating against the window pane. None of them dare to leave the house, not even for food, so Dream is in the process of making do with what they have in the kitchen. Sapnap is off doing God knows what (hopefully sleeping, considering he streamed for roughly 9 hours the night before), but George ends up wandering in just as Dream is scouring the vegetable drawer.

"Do you need some help?"

Dream pulls his head out of the fridge, a bag of broccoli in one hand.

"What?"

George is standing by the doorway, wearing a pair of sweatpants and a large OU shirt, one of his many spoils from Dream's closet. He looks a bit dazed, like he's just woken up from a nap, and Dream is forced to brush past the staggering revelation that George was just sleeping in *his* clothes.

"Do you need help making dinner?" George repeats. "You are making dinner, right?"

"Uh, yeah," Dream confirms. George steps further into the room, rubbing at his eyes and coming to stand at the fridge beside Dream. As reliable as clockwork, Dream feels his body go rigid.

The sixth sense in his brain that was attuned to whatever George was doing had sharpened, ever since that day by the pool, and now he couldn't figure out a way to shut his awareness off. George was near him, and the magnet inside of himself had been set off once again, urging him to move closer, press up against his side, try and figure out which places George would let him put his hands.

"What do we have?" George asks.

"Uh, broccoli, bell peppers," Dream says, motioning to the open vegetable drawer. "Some sausage, I think."

George nods contemplatively. It wasn't that Dream was surprised he was here; normally when he was in the kitchen, George was there too, if only so he could be the first to try whatever Dream happened to be cooking. He'd never offered to help, though. That was new.

"Ok," George finally says, seeming content with the offering. Slowly, as if afraid to startle him, Dream reaches into the drawer and grabs a red bell pepper.

"Do you wanna...chop this up?" He offers. George stares at the pepper, like he's sizing it up, before taking it and heading over to the island in the center of the room. Dream stands in front of the fridge for another moment, his brain a few steps behind. Then, finally, he grabs the sausage, and moves to start cooking.

Once George gets his hands on a cutting board and a knife, it's a bit of a massacre. Dream laughs,

seeing the jagged and mismatched pieces he's cut, and George glares at him sharply, effectively stilling Dream's tongue. Wordlessly, Dream moves to stand beside him, not taking the knife but instead placing his hand over George's. There's such a discrepancy between them that Dream's hand covers his almost entirely.

George's shoulders tense up, just for a moment, but as soon as Dream notices, it passes, and George is back to looking vaguely annoyed.

"It's easier if you go slowly," Dream murmurs, grabbing the non-brutalized half of the pepper. Weirdly enough, George doesn't protest, allowing Dream to guide his hand in steady, smooth motions, slicing the pepper into thin strips. After a moment, Dream lifts his hand, and George continues, a barely perceptible tremor in his fingers.

"So picky," he quips, but he finishes cutting the entire pepper just as Dream showed him.

The rest of the meal comes together pretty easily. Dream grabs a pan and, after slicing the sausage into disks, throws them in to cook. Once they've turned a maple brown color, he sets them aside on a plate and begins to sauté the broccoli. The second the scent of onion and garlic hits the air, George is beside him, eyeing the pan curiously.

"It smells good," he says, lofting himself up onto the counter. Dream grins at the praise, even though he hasn't actually done anything yet besides throw a bunch of shit in a pan.

Outside the window, lightning cleaves the sky, making George jump. His knuckles go white over the edge of the countertop.

"Whoa," he exhales.

"Told you it rained in Florida too," Dream says, recalling George's lamentations about the London weather over the phone, a couple weeks and an entire lifetime ago. One beat, then another, and a rumble of thunder rolls past, echoing through the house. The storm must be right overhead now.

"Yeah, no shit," George says, laughing slightly. "It feels like the house is gonna shake apart."

Dream shrugs. He was more than used to storms like this. As long as they weren't being forced to cower in the basement, or actively flee the area, it felt pretty minor in his book.

"It'll pass," Dream reassures, sparing a glance at George out of the corner of his eye. George nods, gaze still turned towards the window. A comfortable silence settles over them, the only sound coming from the sizzling oil in the pan and the steady thrumming of rain outside. Dream turns a few pieces of broccoli over, and George's attention is back on him, and *that's* when it happens, right then, seemingly apropos of nothing, in the middle of cooking dinner.

George is sitting on the counter, watching Dream push the broccoli back and forth, and Dream decides he'd like to know what it would feel like to get down on his knees and take George in his mouth.

Huh.

The thought hits him so fiercely Dream nearly drops his spatula. He takes a very deliberate breath in through his nose and tries to push it away, but it stays there at the forefront of his mind, lodged there like a rock.

"You alright?" George asks. Dream nods stiffly, not even attempting to offer a response. He doesn't look at him, just continues moving the broccoli around in short, mechanical motions. All of

a sudden, the air around him smells sour and electric. Dream's mouth is so dry, he's worried that if he tries to speak, he'll sound like he's dying.

"Oh, I beat Sapnap in chess three times in a row today!" George says suddenly, perking up. "We made a bet about it too, so he now owes me a hundred subs."

Dream stares down at the pan, his eyes not even registering what's in front of him. It's like his brain is caught in a loop, his mind repeating the thought over and over again like a mantra, like a curse.

"Dream?" George prompts, bumping Dream's leg with his foot. Dream turns to look at him, startled.

"Huh?" He says, finally meeting George's eyes.

George cocks his head to the side, clearly confused by the sudden shift in Dream's behavior.

I wanna know what you taste like.

Dream's hand tightens on the spatula's handle the moment the thought registers. *What the fuck?*

"You look...weird," George observes, chuckling awkwardly. Dream tries for a smile, but by the way his mouth twitches, he's pretty sure it just looks like he's in pain.

"I'm good," Dream assures, tearing his eyes away from George's face, unable to keep his focus there any longer. "Just tired."

Once he's finished cooking, Dream practically inhales his dinner, leaving George in the kitchen with a mumbled assurance that he'll take care of the dishes later. George doesn't move to stop him, and Dream tries to swallow down the feeling that he's running away.

He doesn't go back to work that night. He doesn't even venture out of his room. He just lies on his bed, staring up at his ceiling as the hours slip by. Evening turns to night, and the sky is a solid black mass outside his window, almost foreboding in its intensity. The storm never wavers. There are times where Dream thinks it's actively getting worse, but he can't really be sure.

There's no use in trying to sleep. He feels more awake than he has in ages. And if he did sleep, he isn't sure what dreams would greet him, and that thought alone is enough to keep him up.

He can't let his control slip away, not any further than it already has at least.

Before, Dream's feelings had come in the form of fragments, like a never-ending game of word association. George would sit beside Dream on the couch to watch a movie, their shoulders pressed together, and Dream would think *closer*. George would wander into the bathroom in the morning, while Dream was brushing his teeth, his hair ruffled and eyes half-lidded, and Dream would think *cute*. George would push him a bit, turn his smile coy, drop a comment that made Dream second-guess how much of what passed between them could reasonably be considered a joke, and Dream would think *more*.

But nothing like this, so direct and insistent, had ever entered into his head. And the worst part is, it didn't even feel like a revelation. It felt as casual as anything. Dream wanted to finish editing his video tonight. Dream wanted to buy some more shampoo because he was running low. Dream wanted to know what George tastes like.

Dream knew that he wanted to touch George, to be near him, maybe more than he did with anyone else. But that wasn't anything new; in fact, it made sense, considering that this was the first time they'd actually been physically close enough for that to happen. Dream also knew he thought George was good-looking, but whatever, that was just how things were when you were friends with someone who was absurdly attractive. It was objective. And anything he felt beyond that, any unique appreciation he held for George was too entangled with how much he loved him to be anything more than an extension of that. He was his best friend. It made sense that he liked every part of him.

But *this*, this wasn't objective, and it certainly wasn't friendly. If Dream was simmering before, now he was boiling over. And the worst part of it all was the lack of a catalyst. Dream could always excuse his reaction to certain things. After all, he was only human. Touch, praise, intimacy - it made sense that he wanted all those things, and it made sense that, occasionally, George doling them out would leave his brain feeling a bit scrambled. They never crossed the line though. The tension never lingered between them, at least not for very long. Dream could always deal with his own shit, excuse the way his thoughts would sometimes wander, and things would continue just as they always had.

Now, it feels as if the sky has broken open and the flood Dream was dreading has finally arrived. He's knee-deep in it already. There's no sense in trying to pretend it isn't there.

He wanted George. Not because there was something Dream thought he could get from him, not because he merely wanted to quell his own desires, but because it was *him*. Dream didn't just like the fact that George made him feel good. He wanted to make George feel good too.

Dream presses the heels of his hands over his eyes, forcing them shut. He wasn't an idiot. Well, not entirely. So this wasn't exactly a total surprise. But there was a massive difference between getting turned on by someone, even if that someone was his best friend, and wanting to return the favor tenfold, his own pride and ego be damned.

Particularly when he had no idea whether or not George wanted him back.

Immediately, Dream sits up, shoving that thought aside. That was the one boundary that had to remain firmly in place. George couldn't know, so there was no use in even entertaining that possibility.

Letting out a sigh, Dream's drops his hands, resting them in his lap. The past couple of weeks had changed everything. George's arrival, the announcement and subsequent face reveal, the shifting dynamics in the house, the realization that this was what *forever* was gonna feel like - it was no wonder Dream's head was a fucking mess. His entire life was different now, and while these feelings weren't exactly new, their intensity certainly was. Dream could cope, though. He always did. And whatever was going on now, he's certain it would pass.

It had to. He didn't have any other choice.

The rain lingers. Dream decides to take up running.

He used to run more when he was younger, but eventually, lifting became his preferred method of exercise. It made more sense for him, all things considered. He could do it from the comfort of his own home, which had been a requirement over the past two years, and it was something that took up barely any brain space. His thoughts always wandered when he worked out, which was good.

Now, however, he's trying to prevent exactly that. And running was perfect, it involved his whole body, forced his brain to shut down, pulling all his focus towards keeping his breathing steady and putting one foot in front of the other. There's a park near their house, occupied pretty much exclusively by old people who haven't the faintest idea of who he is, so Dream goes there, his feet pounding evenly against the pavement, music blasting through his headphones. He's so focused, he barely even notices when the rain, which had settled into a light mist that morning, starts up again, soaking him in an instant. He only stops to slick his hair back out of his eyes (long, still so long) before picking up again, relishing the burning in his lungs and the blissful void in his mind. He isn't sure how long he runs for. All he knows is that when he finally stops, collapsing back against a tree, his legs are shaking so much that he can barely keep himself upright.

Dream staggers back home at half-jog, trying to ignore the way his mind immediately begins to return to the same place, the same familiar pattern of thoughts. Apparently, his relief was destined to be short-lived.

The second he gets inside and removes his shoes, he heads up to the third floor, not wanting to remain downstairs for too long on the off chance that someone was hanging around. It's been about 36 hours since he last saw George, which was unheard of for the two of them. Dream normally got antsy at about the three hour mark, and sometimes George took even less time before he was barging into Dream's room, or meeting him in the kitchen, or dragging him off to the pool, completely undeterred by whatever existing plans Dream may have. It had been like that before they'd been in the same house, obviously, but something about the proximity had exacerbated it, to the point where 36 hours felt agonizing.

Still - Dream wasn't sure he could trust himself quite yet. He'd never been the best at keeping his thoughts to himself, particularly when it came to George. What he needed was space and time, at least as much as he could reasonably give himself before anyone grew suspicious.

The second floor of the house is eerily quiet. The three of them always kept odd hours, so Dream honestly wouldn't be surprised if Sapnap was sleeping, despite it being the middle of the day. There's no noise on the third floor either, and when Dream heads into the bathroom, he doesn't bother closing the door behind him, assuming that he's the only one conscious in the house at the moment.

He shucks off his shirt in one easy motion, before taking it in his hands and wringing it out over the sink. An involuntary shiver crawls its way up his spine; he really *did* keep the house cold.

Meeting his own eyes in the mirror, Dream runs a hand through his hair, trying to tame it. It falls back into its natural shape immediately, unaffected. He sighs. No use in fighting it.

Then, from across the hall, Dream hears footsteps.

He whips his head around just in time to see George emerge from his room, eyes going wide when he spots Dream.

"Hello," he greets. There are no lights on in the hallway, and no light coming from George's room either, so he's framed mostly in shadow, as if he materialized out of nothing.

"Hi," Dream replies, body still turned towards the sink. George's eyes go down, along his torso, lower still, then back up abruptly. George had seen him without his shirt on numerous times before, so why now did Dream suddenly feel so exposed?

"You've been avoiding me," George says bluntly. Dream is so surprised, he lets out a genuine laugh.

"No, I haven't," he says. George crosses his arms over his chest, a defensive posture.

"Yeah, you have," he insists, as intransigent as ever. Despite himself, Dream smiles. If he were to write out a list of constants in the universe, he's certain "George is stubborn" would be right up there between "the sky is blue" and "the earth is round."

"I've been busy," Dream says, not quite a lie. He *had* been particularly swamped lately, but both he and George knew that had never stopped them from spending time together in the past. As far as excuses go, it was on the flimsier side. George raises an eyebrow.

"Doing what, avoiding me?" He continues, pushing further. Dream grips the sink, letting his head fall forward.

"Sorry, it's just..." he hesitates. "My rhythm's been off. We haven't been syncing up lately, I guess."

He spares a glance up at George again, and immediately his stomach clenches at the expression on his face. It's guarded, which Dream always hates. George could be so quick to withdraw if he felt like he was being tricked, or made fun of, and sometimes it took ages to bring him back out again. Straightening up, Dream turns to face him fully now, unwilling to let him slip away.

"Ok," George mutters, eyes flitting away. "Can we sync up again?"

George still doesn't look at him, but Dream nods, trying not to let the guilt overwhelm him. Even though he'd done what he thought was right in the moment, now he realizes how immature it had been, to pull back so suddenly without a word. George deserved better than that.

"Of course," he says. George nods, eyes still focused somewhere else, before clearing his throat.

"Why are you wet?" He demands, as if Dream's dampness was of great personal offense to him.

"Oh, I went for a run," Dream explains. George's eyes return to him and this time they stay there. God, Dream was never gonna get used to that gaze. It felt like George was looking *through* him.

"Why?" George asks, sounding genuinely confused.

"Exercise, George," Dream says, a self-satisfied smile on his face. "It's good for you."

George rolls his eyes. "How virtuous."

"You could join me sometime, if you like," Dream offers, already anticipating the type of reaction his words will receive. True to form, George scoffs.

"Sure, if you carry me the whole time," he says.

"I could," Dream says with a shrug. He was in no position to make that sort of statement (he was strong but not *that* strong), but it earns him a smile nonetheless, and immediately Dream wants to make more outlandish promises to go alongside it, if only to keep George looking at him like that.

This felt normal. More than normal, it felt *good*. He could do this.

"Hey, I got that plug-in installed for the next video," George says suddenly, changing the subject. "The shrinking one."

"Oh, cool," Dream nods, confused as to why the conversation had just veered so sharply into work talk. Not that he minded, really, but still - it was a bit odd, coming from George.

“Yeah, you should test it out. It’s already up on my computer,” he says. Dream raises his eyebrows. George, suggesting they work unprompted, in the middle of the day? What the hell had happened in the 36 hours they didn’t talk?

“Uh, sure we can do it tonight,” Dream says.

“We really should do it now,” George insists. “Or else I’ll get distracted, or tired, and I won’t wanna do it later.”

Dream stares at him, completely dumbfounded.

“I need to shower,” Dream says lamely, gesturing back behind him. “I’m pretty sweaty, so-”

“No, I wanna do it now,” George interrupts, doubling down. Ok, so he was just being difficult. Dream matches his posture, crossing his arms and refusing to budge an inch.

“So?” He asks, barely concealed frustration creeping into his tone. George was being annoying, and pushy, and the tension in Dream’s jaw was clearly a byproduct of that, and not of any sort of desire he had to see just how demanding George could get, perhaps in a different context. Obviously.

George matches his gaze, the barest hint of a smile ghosting along his lips. He doesn’t even offer a rebuttal. He just stands there, clearly feeling as if no further persuasion was necessary. Which was ridiculous. Why would Dream say yes? It didn’t make any logical sense. He did need to shower, and he was exhausted after his run. They could always test the plug-in later, in fact, it probably made more sense to wait until Sapnap could join them too, and Callahan as well, just to make sure it wasn’t buggy. No, just because George wanted to do it right this second didn’t mean Dream would agree. Even though George had just admitted (in so many words) that he wanted to spend more time with him. And Dream had sorely missed him over the past day or so, despite the fact that their separation had been self-imposed. Also, he did really want to try out the mod. He’d been toying with the idea for ages, and he was excited to see if they could actually pull it off.

Oh my God, he was gonna end up saying yes, wasn’t he? Dream’s fist tightens, bunching up his shirt further. *Damnit*. He needed to become less easy to win over. George was getting too good at this.

“You know,” he mutters, finally stepping out of the bathroom and coming to stand in George’s space. “Whatever poor sucker never said no to you created a real monster.”

George’s smile only grows, and he looks awfully pleased with himself. Then, in a truly unexpected move, he reaches up and *pats Dream’s head*, tamping down his wet curls slightly. *Oh my God*. He might as well have just called Dream *a good boy*.

Surely that should piss Dream off a bit more. And surely he shouldn’t be fighting off the desire to hear those exact words leave George’s lips right this second.

“Oh yeah,” George agrees easily. “He doesn’t know the half of it.”

Dream’s track record for good judgement that day continues to plummet, because a moment later he’s sitting in George’s chair, Minecraft booted up in front of him, *without a fucking shirt on*. He isn’t even sure how this happened, but one moment he was agreeing to try the plug-in and the next George was ushering him into his room before Dream even got the chance to address the fact that he was still half-naked. His only salvation, the shirt he ran in, is bunched up into a damp, wrinkled

ball on the floor beside him. There's no way Dream could try to put it back on without looking even more insane than he already does.

George is seated at his elbow, on a slightly shorter chair, leaning in close to get a better look at the screen. The only other light in the room, besides faint glow coming from the computer in front of them, is the small lamp on George's bedside table. Outside his window, there's still no sign of sun, the cover of clouds as persistent as ever.

"Ok, try to pick up the axe," he mutters. Dream goes for it, directing his character (who is a tiny bit smaller than normal) to grab the item. He succeeds, casting a grin over at George.

"It works," he confirms. George nods.

"Now wait a bit, you'll shrink again," he says, leaning in further. Dream swallows, willing his heartbeat to steady as best he can. George is practically pressed against his side right now, chin bumping slightly against Dream's shoulder. Desperate to keep his mind occupied, Dream makes his character run in circles for a bit, before heading over to a tree and chopping at it, the movements coming instinctually.

Then, just as he's trying to hunt down a cow to kill, his character shrinks again. George laughs, and Dream feels the breath of it against his ear.

"Nice," he says, his voice coming out a bit shaky.

"Keep doing stuff, I wanna see how little you can get," George says.

"Aw, maybe I'll get as small as you are," Dream says, smirking. George reaches forward and pinches Dream's side sharply. His *bare* side. Jesus christ.

"Shut up," George mutters. Dream tries for another smile, but his brain has stalled on the brief feeling of George's fingers pressed into his skin. Clearly coming in here had been a mistake.

Still - now that he's started, Dream wants to keep playing.

He devotes more concentration to actually beating the game, George offering commentary as he goes. At one point, Dream ends up taking an embarrassingly long amount of time to construct a smoker after George's hand accidentally bumps against his thigh, which sends George off into a fit of laughter. Dream silently endures it, hoping that the cause of his sudden distraction wasn't obvious.

With every minute that passes, his character continues to shrink in increments. It's actually pretty funny to watch the tiny Dream on screen wield a pickaxe as big as his whole body. The plug-in works without issue, and as the trial goes on, Dream grows more and more convinced that it'll make a good video.

"I should test it against mobs more," he murmurs. "And see how it handles the dragon, too. I mean what if I get to The End and I'm too small to even reach her?"

George shrugs, before bringing his elbow up onto the table and resting his chin in his hand.

"Just run it a couple times," he suggests. Dream nods, feeling himself fall easily back into game-mode. He could spend hours like this, poking at the mod and looking for flaws until he's sure it's perfect. George, for his part, seems to be devoting less and less attention to the screen and more on Dream himself, which is worrying. He probably looks a bit silly, sitting there playing Minecraft in front of him without a shirt on. He rolls his shoulders back, trying to remain focused on the task at

hand. The sweat has already dried on his skin, and either he's just way more aware of it than George is or George truly doesn't mind, because he doesn't move away.

Dream beats the game, then goes back to do it again, trying to plan for other scenarios that could come up during filming. He lets his character get really really tiny in order to figure out gameplay at that scale, but then he and George become so preoccupied with comparing its size to different animals that they get completely sidetracked.

It's weirdly nostalgic, sitting there fucking around on Minecraft with George giggling beside him. It's then that Dream is struck with the realization that this is the first time they've actually done this together in person. Even the work they'd done on videos before this had been in their own separate rooms. Dream turns to his side, a soft smile on his face. George catches his eye.

"What?" He asks.

"We're playing Minecraft together," he says. George stares at him.

"Uh, yes we are, Dream," he says slowly. "Did you receive a traumatic head injury I don't know about? Maybe one that causes short term memory loss?"

Dream shakes his head. "No, I mean, we're *here*. Playing Minecraft. Together."

George rolls his eyes, but Dream can tell by the way his lips tug at the corners that he's fighting off a smile. Dream grins at him, completely unashamed.

"You are such an idiot," George says. "Do you want to take a picture or something? Put it in a little scrapbook?"

"Ha ha," Dream deadpans. "Sorry for being sentimental."

"You're always sentimental," George says with a laugh. "It's so cheesy. You're the cheesiest."

"Yeah, because you've never been sentimental about anything before," Dream says pointedly, gesturing to the desk in front of them. Crowded up near George's monitor is a collection of knick-knacks: souvenirs from vlogs he'd done with Tommy, Sapnap's pin, the rose quartz elephant, a collection of Dream Team wristbands, a taped-up of Polaroid of him and Quackity, a ring from Karl. Everything had been meticulously transported from the UK. It was the first thing George had set up when he arrived.

George blanches, turning his eyes back towards the screen in front of them.

"Whatever," he mutters. "Your hunger is low, idiot. Go get food."

Dream chuckles, but moves to chase after a pig all the same.

He isn't sure how much time passes, but pretty soon, George's commentary becomes less and less frequent. When Dream glances to his side again, finally pulling his focus away from the game, George is resting his head on his arms, looking like he's on the verge of sleep.

"Am I really that boring?" Dream asks teasingly. George shakes his head.

"No," he says, his voice slightly muffled by the sleeve of his hoodie. "Sorry. I just haven't been sleeping well lately."

Dream frowns, turning in his chair to face him.

“You haven’t?”

George shrugs, eyelids gone heavy.

“s fine,” he assures. “Just keep playing.”

“George, you should really get some rest,” Dream says. “Come on, I don’t need to finish this right now.”

“Stay,” George insists, reaching out a hand and resting it on Dream’s arm. Dream stares down at him, surprised.

“You sure?” Dream asks. Slowly, George nods.

“It’s easier, sometimes,” he mutters. “To fall asleep around you. I got so used to it, on calls and stuff. My room feels...too quiet. I don’t know.”

Before he can think to stop himself, Dream reaches out a hand and brushes some of George’s hair out of his face. At the touch, George lets out a soft breath, his eyes fluttering shut.

“Ok,” Dream murmurs. “I’ll stay. Will you at least get into bed, though?”

George opens his eyes and glares up at him.

“Fine,” he huffs, as if Dream has just asked him to perform some incredibly taxing feat. Dream grins, watching George push his chair back far enough so he can slide onto the bed behind him with very little effort. His feet barely touch the floor.

“Now keep playing,” George instructs once he’s settled in.

“So demanding, George,” Dream chastises. “What’s the magic word?”

George picks up a pillow and chucks it at him, aiming for Dream’s face. Dream laughs brightly, catching it before it can make contact.

“Alright, alright!” Dream concedes. “You’re grumpy when you’re tired.”

As if on cue, George yawns, settling further back into his blankets. Dream turns away hastily, not wanting to dwell on the image of him in bed any longer.

He throws himself back into the game, beating it again, then another time just for good measure. Even playing on his own, he finds himself suppressing laughter at the sight of his tiny character running around. It’s a good concept, and he’s sure once the three of them are able to sit down and film it, the video will come together no problem. Dream grins to himself, leaning back in the chair and feeling satisfied. He liked when things worked. As much as he was willing to grind and put in extra effort to get stuff done when needed, it was always nice when something came easily.

It’s already approaching evening, and Dream can finally hear sounds of Sapnap moving on the floor below. Maybe he’d tell him that they tested out the mod, and they could make a plan to sit down and film tomorrow. Now that Dream was certain the concept worked, he wanted to get it done as soon as possible, keep his momentum going. After filming, he could throw himself into editing, then upload it, keep track of the numbers and the audience reception, figure out what their next move would be. That’s what he needed; more projects to work on, more ways to occupy his time. That was his normal, and the more he could do to maintain it, the better off he would be.

Like just now, how it felt playing with George, *that's* what Dream needed to focus on: how well they worked together, how great they functioned as a team. George was his best friend, his collaborator since Dream was a teenager, and their dynamic (even with all its eccentricities) was infallible. He could set his watch by it.

Whatever strangeness was going on inside his head felt insignificant compared to that. They had built their careers together, structured their lives around each other, entangled even the boring bits. Dream loved George, and would obviously do anything for him, but there was also a comforting practicality to their relationship. A familiarity. And Dream wouldn't jeopardize that, not for the entire fucking world. He'd ruin a lot of things, himself included, if it meant keeping George with him, exactly as they were.

They'd waited for so long, after all. And they'd finally gotten what they wanted. Right?

Dream sighs, running a hand over his face. He was bone tired, his legs still sore from his run, but his head feels clearer now, less muddled. This would work. Things could be normal. Could be *good*.

Then, from behind him, George lets out a soft murmur, blankets shifting around him. Dream, very purposefully, does not look back.

That is until George says his name.

Twice.

Dream whips around, the chair creaking with the sudden movement. George was undeniably still asleep, his eyes closed and his chest moving up and down evenly, and yet he had just *said Dream's name*. Not even said it. He'd *breathed* it.

George rolls over again, his brow furrowing slightly. Dream is completely frozen in place. He's not sure a single force in the universe could make him tear his eyes away.

"Mhm," George mumbles. And then, again, so quiet it's barely audible and yet clear enough to be understood: "*Dream*."

Dream stands up from the chair suddenly, not even caring about the noise he makes, and is out the door in seconds, shutting it behind him with a definitive *click*. He heads for the bathroom on autopilot, locking himself inside and turning on the shower. There's no thought behind his movements, it's all muscle memory, as Dream strips out of his (remaining) clothes and steps underneath the scalding stream. His eyes stare blankly at the white curtain in front of him, his breathing coming ragged and shallow.

George had been asleep, and he'd said Dream's name, said it *three times*, in a way Dream had never heard his name said before, not by anyone. It didn't even feel like *his* name anymore, it felt like a word that had lived and died in George's mouth, like he'd invented it. The withdrawal he feels is instant and brutal. Dream wants to hear him say his name like that again, wants it so badly he feels nearly sick over it.

Fucking hell. Was his resolve really that weak? That this was all it took to make him crumble, the idea that George was thinking about him like that, was *dreaming* about him?

His brain flees to impossibilities, imagining what it would be like to hear George say his name like that again, but this time pinned underneath him, head thrown back, or perched over Dream's chest, eyes dark and mouth eager. A hot wave of guilt settles over him, and Dream turns around, pressing

his forehead firmly against the tiled wall.

He isn't sure how long he stays there. It takes a while, to calm his breathing again, to force his mind away from those thoughts. Sheer willpower, really, is what rescues him from the ledge.

By the time he leaves the shower, the pads of his fingers have gone pruny and his skin is a bright, irritated pink. All the steam has clouded the mirror, so when Dream goes to meet his reflection, he can't even see his own face staring back.

The next day brings clear skies, a much needed respite from the rain. Dream's sleep schedule is completely shot once again, so doesn't end up rousing himself until the afternoon. When he walks into the kitchen, he's surprised to find Sapnap and George there as well, poking through the fridge. It seems like all of their weird schedules have aligned for a mid-day breakfast.

"Morning," he greets. George whips around at the sound of his voice, almost dropping the jug of apple juice he's holding.

"Hello," he says, his voice coming out a bit forced. Dream frowns. Weird.

"No eggs either," Sapnap mutters, shutting the fridge door and turning to look at Dream. "Dream, why are you trying to starve us?"

Dream lets out a laugh. "I'm not trying to starve you. My mom is going shopping today. I'll ask her to get more."

"Good, because we have no food in this house," George says, sounding like his normal self again. Without being asked, Dream heads to the cabinet on the other side of the room and grabs three glasses. He slides two over to George and Sapnap across the island, and goes to fill the other with some water for himself.

"We have plenty of food, don't be a drama queen."

Even as he says it, Dream isn't actually sure how accurate that statement is. It *had* been a while since they'd last restocked the kitchen.

"I'm not being a drama queen," George insists. "But if your mom doesn't come back with groceries today, I will die. And it *will* be your fault."

Dream turns to look at him, a smirk on his face.

"I can live with that," he says. "Your epitaph can read: here lies Minecraft YouTuber GeorgeNotFound. A grown man who died because he didn't know how to feed himself."

Sapnap lets out a loud laugh, and George pauses his pouring of juice to glare at him threateningly. It's dumb how quickly Dream relents at the sight; obviously they were all joking around, but still.

"I'll send her a list," he assures. "You won't starve on my watch."

The side of George's lip ticks upwards, in a movement that almost looks involuntary.

"Good," he says, before taking a slow sip from his glass. Beside him, Sapnap finally finishes pouring his orange juice.

"Well, what do we eat right now?" He implores, sitting down at one of the barstools with a huff.

Dream takes an assessing look around the kitchen.

“Uh,” he begins, heading over to one of the cupboards and opening it up. “We have some cereal.”

“I don’t want Sapnap’s cereal,” George says, cringing. “That stuff is so sugary.”

“First of all, my cereal is delicious,” Sapnap retorts. “Second of all, who said you were allowed to have any?”

“We have Cheerios too, those aren’t too sweet,” Dream offers. George comes to stand next to him, staring up at the shelf curiously. He still smells like sleep, which is such a weird thing for Dream to notice, because what the hell did *sleep* even smell like? On George, it was a warm, comforting scent, unmistakably him and yet also somehow eerily similar to what Dream himself smelled like; the shampoo they both used, the laundry detergent that they shared. It makes him wanna bury his nose in George’s hair and inhale.

Instead, Dream clears his throat, furrowing his brow at the cereal in front of them. He sort of looks like he’s trying to explode the boxes with his mind.

“Fine, I’ll eat Cheerios, whatever,” George says. “Watch me.”

George reaches up, his fingers just barely brushing the top shelf where the cereal sits. He sighs, and places a hand firmly against the countertop, standing on his tip toes and trying to vault himself higher. Dream watches him with faint amusement, until finally George groans and turns to look at him.

“You’re enjoying this aren’t you?” He demands.

“Who, me?” Dream asks, feigning innocence. “Never.”

“Then help me, idiot!” George insists, whacking him on the arm. Dream laughs, rubbing at his bicep where the blow had landed.

“You could always say please, you know,” Dream suggests, a placid smile on his face. George fixes him with a stare that’s so fierce, Dream genuinely thinks he might try to attack him for real this time, so he concedes, reaching up and grabbing the box. George accepts it, looks at him for another moment, and then turns around, stomping over to the cabinet where they keep their bowls.

“You want any?” He asks, turning his head to glance back at Dream.

“Uh, sure,” Dream responds, surprised by the offer.

“Too bad!” George retorts, but grabs two bowls anyway. Dream shakes his head, coming to lean on the island beside Sapnap.

“Aren’t you gonna ask me if I want some?” Sapnap asks. George turns around, looking a bit caught off guard.

“Uh,” he says, eyes briefly flitting back to Dream before landing on Sapnap again. “No, obviously. You’d never eat something this healthy. Duh.”

Sapnap shrugs. “You got me there.”

George sets the bowls down on the island, suddenly intent on avoiding Dream’s gaze, and goes to grab the milk.

After they've eaten, Dream takes quick stock of the kitchen, trying to figure out exactly what he needs to ask his mom to grab. Sapnap requests Cheetos, eggs and more orange juice. George asks for lemonade, Takis, and 'those weird pocket things with cheese, you know what I'm talking about' (Pizza Rolls, Dream deduces.) Dream fills in the gaps where the vegetables and other, real food should go, all while trying not to dwell too much on the fact that he's taking into account the meals that George had liked the most over the past week. Whatever, Dream had liked all that stuff too, so it made sense to buy those ingredients again.

But when he texts his mom the list, he gets a response back almost immediately -

"Shit," he sighs, glancing up from his phone. "My mom has a doctor's appointment today, I completely forgot. It's gonna take up her whole afternoon."

"So no groceries?" Sapnap infers. Dream nods. "Damn."

"Why don't we just go?" George suggests.

"Do you...want to?" Dream asks. While they'd all hung out outside the house plenty of times before, they'd never done something as mundane as run an errand together. It wasn't exactly fun, which is why Dream is surprised when George nods.

"Sure," he says. "Why not?"

"Great, you two can go get groceries," Sapnap says with a grin. "And I can wait here for my food to be brought to me."

Dream rolls his eyes. "Yeah, alright. But that means George and I get to pick out everything."

"No fair, I already put my requests in!" Sapnap insists.

"Too bad," George retorts. "We're only gonna get food you hate."

Sapnap frowns. "You're so mean to me, George."

George laughs at the sight of his pout. "Aw, poor little Sappynap. It's ok, we'll get plenty of baby food for you to eat."

"Ok, come on," Dream says with a chuckle, cutting them off before the spat can escalate any further. "We're filming today. Go get your asses ready."

"I don't want to," George says automatically. "I'm streaming instead."

"Sure you are," Dream says, not buying the clearly fake excuse for even a moment.

"A 24 hour sub-a-thon," George continues, grinning up at him. "And you're gonna be on it with me for the whole time, right Dream?"

"You're really funny, you know that?" Dream asks, sarcasm dripping from his tone.

"Your mom sure thinks so," George retorts.

Dream *wants* to be annoyed, he really does, but everything George does is so goddamn charming to him right now that he's actually sort of endeared by their stupid back and forth. He's probably smiling at him like a total idiot right now, because George's expression changes, and he's looking at Dream like he doesn't quite know what to make of him. Immediately, Dream wipes the look off his face, and turns to Sapnap again, insisting that they get a move on for real this time.

Even as he ushers them all out of the kitchen, he can still feel the slight tug that lingers between him and George, every time their eyes happen to meet.

The filming session goes off without a hitch. Not even Dream's own internal chaos can prevent him from feeling happy about that. After they're done, George says he needs to take a nap, which Dream is fine with, it's not like their grocery trip is urgent. He almost expects George to end up forgetting about it all together, or beg out at the last minute. He could always just ask his mom to go tomorrow anyway.

But then, an hour later, while he's relaxing on his bed, half-paying attention to his Twitter feed as he scrolls, George walks into his room. He's dressed in actual clothes now, a navy blue t-shirt and a pair of black jeans, and when Dream looks up at him surprise, he just gestures for him to get up.

"Come on," he says, looking down at Dream expectantly. "Chop chop."

It strikes him as a bit odd, how eager George is to go to the supermarket, but Dream obliges. They did need to get food, and the truth is Dream was happy to do *anything* with George, no matter how unexciting.

The drive doesn't take too long. There's a store about 20 minutes away, and George spends the entire ride over with his feet propped up on the dashboard of Dream's car, scrolling through a playlist on this phone. It's full of songs Dream doesn't recognize, and when he asks him about it, George very reluctantly admits that the playlist is actually Quackity's. Dream grins to himself. He knew expanding George's music taste had been a personal project of Quackity's for a while. He's glad to know he had finally succeeded.

Eventually, a song comes on that Dream knows, and he sings along to it absentmindedly, hands drumming against the steering wheel. Despite the fact that the car's AC is on, he still has his window rolled down, and he's pulled about half of his hair back away from his face in what he assumes looks like a pretty mangled attempt at a ponytail, trying to prevent it from getting tangled by the breeze. The storm had cleared away most of the humidity in the air, but the sun is still high and intense overhead, making beads of sweat prick up on the back of his neck.

When they finally pull into the parking lot and Dream backs up into a spot, his arm flung over the back of the passenger seat in an attempt to get a better look behind him, George keeps his eyes trained on him. Dream wonders if this is some sort of weird assessment, like George is trying to figure out if he's actually a good driver or something, because he tracks Dream's movements *so* intensely. When he feels like the car is straight enough, Dream drops his arm and moves to turn the key.

"Ready?" He prompts. George nods, eyes lingering for a moment more before he tears them away.

"Ready," he confirms, and moves to exit the car.

The moment they step through the sliding glass doors, a wave of AC hits them, so powerful it makes goosebumps sprout up along Dream's arms. Immediately, he wishes he'd brought a hoodie to tug on over his thin, white t-shirt. There's a tinny pop song playing on the store's speakers, and a handful of people milling around the aisles, but it's not crowded by any means. Dream grabs a cart, and begins making his way towards the produce section, George trailing behind him.

"What do we need?" George asks. Dream tugs out his phone from his back pocket and pulls up the list he'd written in his Notes app.

“Uh, sweet potatoes. Spinach. Carrots,” he reads off. “Broccoli. Some fruit, if we want.”

George hums noncommittally, as he begins to scan the massive piles of fruit surrounding them. His eyes land on a towering pyramid of oranges, so bright they’re almost glowing under the fluorescent lights. George grabs a few off the top, then places them in the cart. They roll around lazily as Dream continues his search for the vegetables, finally spotting some bags of spinach lined up in neat rows against the far wall.

“So healthy, Dream,” George mocks, coming to stand beside him. “You just love spinach *so* much.”

“You literally ate spinach the other day,” Dream points out, grabbing a bag.

“What? No, I didn’t,” George insists. “When?”

“There was spinach in that pasta dish I made,” Dream explains. “The ravioli, remember?”

“Oh, right,” George says, a small frown crossing his face. “Well, that was good. Get more then.”

Dream laughs, but grabs another bag nonetheless.

It’s weird, when Dream was younger he mostly saw grocery shopping as a chore, but right now it doesn’t feel like that at all. It’s been literal years since he last set foot inside a supermarket, and in the meantime he’d gotten so used to either having his mom do all the shopping or simply getting groceries delivered whenever she wasn’t free. It had obviously made sense back when Dream was still faceless, and every small excursion outside came with a massive amount of risk, but now he finds himself reveling in the normalcy of it all. The first time he makes eye contact with a stranger and exchanges a small smile, he actually feels sort of giddy.

“This is nice,” he says suddenly, which earns him an odd look from George. They’re making steady progress through the store, only pausing every few steps if one of them spots something they need to get.

“What, shopping?” George asks, grabbing a bag of pasta and dropping it into the cart.

“Yeah,” Dream confirms, shrugging lightly. “I can’t remember the last time I actually went out and got my own groceries.”

“I always hated shopping,” George says with a grimace. “Not like I ever really cooked for myself anyway, but still. It was a pain, having to lug the food back home without a car.”

“But you like this?” Dream prompts, a sly smile on his face. After all, George had been the one so dead-set on their trip. George turns to glare at him, which only makes Dream’s smile deepen.

“I like that you’re gonna buy me whatever I want,” George says, smirking.

“Who says I’m gonna do that?” Dream asks. George looks at him, then down at the cart. Dream follows his gaze. Sure enough, only about a third of the food in the cart is the stuff Dream actually came in intending to buy. The rest of it is all George’s additions, including a carton of chocolate milk, a can of Pringles, and some boxed Mac and Cheese.

When did that happen?

Dream looks back up, unsurprised to find George grinning at him.

“Let’s keep going,” he says, turning on his heel and offering no further explanation. Despite the fact that he thinks it might not be in his best interest, Dream follows.

In the end, they probably go a bit over-board. Dream would like to blame it all on George, but apparently he’s a bad influence, because soon Dream finds himself randomly picking stuff up and dropping it in the cart with very little discernment. At one point, he comes across a comically large jar of Nutella and grabs it without a second thought. The whole way through the rest of the store, George keeps on glancing down at the jar, as if waiting for Dream to comment on it. He never does.

There are some additions that Dream takes note of too. Namely, another box of protein bars tossed in by George, the same kind he’d brought Dream the other night, and a small tub of green powder, which George explains is matcha.

“Tina told me about it,” he mutters, not meeting Dream’s eyes for some reason. “It’s like, caffeinated but sort of healthy, I think. And it’s not coffee, so. Maybe you can try it.”

Dream nods, a small smile on his face.

“Sure,” he says. He’s struck with the strange urge to carry the container in his hands, as if it’s more precious than the rest of the items, but he resists, letting George set it down in the cart.

Dream is clearly getting too predictable, because he does end up buying everything, just like George said he would. The man running the cash register is visibly surprised by the sheer size of their haul, but Dream supposes that’s a fair reaction. They probably do look a bit weird - two twenty-something guys walking out of the store with enough food to feed a family of eight.

“Tell Nick we got the stuff he asked for,” Dream says once they’ve loaded all the groceries into the trunk and are back in the car.

George leans over to show Dream his phone screen. There’s a picture of him, a selfie he must’ve snapped at some point in the store, pouting at the screen and holding a small container of baby food. Below it reads:

got your food!

Then, in the grey bubble beneath that message, a photo of some of Patches’ treats, and a text from Sapnap:

and i got yours!

“Oh my God,” Dream says, chuckling.

“I’m telling him we’re hiding all the food when we get home,” George says, pulling his phone back. “And he’s gonna have to provide for himself.”

“That’s an empty threat,” Dream says. “We both know you aren’t gonna help put away the groceries.”

George’s focus is still on his phone, but his lips quirk up into a smile at Dream’s words.

“Sure I will,” he says. “For a price.”

Dream grins. He brings his elbow up, resting it on the the center console, and George turns to look at him, eyes sharp and watchful, just like always.

“It’s always something with you,” Dream says. George’s smile grows, and the phone is set down in his lap, his full attention back on Dream. *Finally*.

Dream decides to brush past that intensely needy thought and focus instead on how George leans in to meet him, propping up his elbow beside Dream’s and resting his chin on his hand.

“I’m hungry,” he says, like it’s a statement, command, request and plea, all in one.

“Good thing we have a lot of food that we just bought in the trunk,” Dream reminds him.

“But I can’t eat any of that food *now*, Dream,” George says. He’s clearly enjoying the game of it, all smiles and darting eyes, as if he can’t decide which part of Dream he wants to look at more.

“Patience is a virtue, George,” Dream replies, half-wondering why he feels like he’s just been hit with a spell of vertigo, watching as George’s smile tilts into something more dangerous, more testing.

“I think we both know, between the two of us,” he murmurs. “You’re the virtuous one.”

Dream raises his eyebrows. Part of his brain is screaming at him right now to back up, put more space between them, but it almost feels like Dream is listening to the sound from a separate room, like he can barely hear it at all. Maybe it should frighten him, how easily he always gives over to his impulses. Or maybe, the reason it didn’t was because whenever he felt like he stepped too far, George was always there to meet him.

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Dream says, chest rumbling when he speaks. It doesn’t come out sounding nearly as funny as he intended. Out of his lips, it sounds more like a admittance of guilt.

George’s eyes search his face, mouth still partly covered by his palm. At that moment, Dream wishes that there was no separation between them at all, that he could hear every thought that crossed into George’s mind, and vice versa. It would be easier that way. If he didn’t have to say it all out loud.

Then, George’s hand falls away. An open challenge.

“Prove it,” he says.

All the air seems to be sucked out of the car at once, leaving Dream lightheaded. The words are goading, a half-joke intended to get some sort of reaction out of him, Dream’s sure of it, but George looks so *honest* that it disarms him. George was always doing this, pulling these sleights-of-hand, these reversals that left Dream feeling like he was about ten steps behind, only for him to turn around and wait for Dream to provide an answer to a question he never asked.

The thing is: Dream would if he could. If George asked, he’s pretty sure there’s not a single thing in the world he’d refuse.

But now, in the absence of certainty -

Dream falters.

He leans back in his seat, creating a gulf of distance between them again, and lets out an unsteady laugh, trying to find humor where there is none.

“Yeah, alright,” he says. “We can get food. Happy?”

He doesn't even glance over at George to gauge his reaction. Wordlessly, he guides them out of the parking lot, eyes trained on the road, turned hazy by the swiftly setting sun. George doesn't say anything. Just falls back into his seat, head turned away, and looks down at his hands.

Dream doesn't get lost, exactly. He just sort of forgets that he's supposed to be paying attention to where they're going. He has a plan to find some sort of fast food restaurant, a place they'll both like, but before he knows it it's well past sunset and he's off down some weird strip of road he doesn't recognize, far out of the city, populated by strip malls and sprawling car dealerships. Clearly he's a bit distracted.

Despite the fact that the sun has long since disappeared, the heat outside only seems to be getting stronger, pressing up against the car with tangible force. Dream turns the AC on full blast and does his best to ignore it.

George stares at the landscape blankly as it rolls by his window, seemingly unaware that Dream has taken them far off their intended course. He doesn't play any music, and Dream doesn't either, too nervous to try and ask for the aux back. Neither of them say a word. It's like they're conspiring together to make the environment in the car as awkward as possible. *Figures*, Dream thinks ruefully, *that even when we aren't talking, we still make a good team.*

Then, when Dream rolls up to a red light, George reaches over and slaps him hard on the chest.

“Ow!” Dream exclaims, shocked out of his stupor. “What the hell, George?”

“Look!” George says, ignoring him. Dream follows his gaze across the intersection. There, all lit up by a plethora of neon signs decorating the exterior, is an old-fashioned, chrome diner. The biggest sign, which Dream can read clearly even from a distance, is one that reads: Open 24/7.

Dream turns to George and meets his eyes. George beams at him.

Dream pulls into the diner's parking lot without a second thought.

Once they step inside, the strangeness only intensifies. The place looks like it was plucked right out of the 1950s. Big red leather booths, a long and wide countertop with stools lined up in front of it, a jukebox in the corner playing a steady stream of Elvis' greatest hits. Even the servers are wearing old-timey uniforms, with small white aprons attached to the front.

George drags Dream to a booth all the way near the back, sporting a massive grin on his face. They aren't even that many other patrons in the diner, but the small bit of privacy is still nice.

“This is *weird*,” Dream says with a chuckle once they're seated, massive laminated menus unfolded in front of them. “It's like a time capsule.”

“I thought every restaurant in America would look like this,” George says teasingly. Dream scoffs. The tension from the car seems to have faded, but Dream can still feel the impression of it lingering, left behind like marks on skin. Dream recalls having heard something once about how it became harder for a limb to heal after each injury it endured. That's what it felt like now - like every time they stepped too far, it became more and more difficult for them to bounce back.

A waitress comes over a few moments later. She's clearly in her 50s, and sporting a name tag that reads *Beth*, and when Dream orders, she thanks him and calls him “sugar,” which makes him blush.

with embarrassment. George takes note of this, judging by the massive grin on his face.

Then, when she returns in a couple of minutes with the strawberry milkshake George ordered and places two straws down without asking, it's George's turn to go red.

Without a word, Dream props the straws up in the cup and looks at George expectantly. George kicks him in the shin.

"Can you imagine if someone saw us here?" George asks after a moment, glancing around the diner. He doesn't look nervous, just curious to see if any of the other guests have taken note of them. None of them have glanced their way even once; tucked away back in the corner, the two of them are practically invisible.

"What, getting food together?" Dream asks. George was far more used to being out in public than Dream, so he's surprised to hear him bring it up.

"Is that what this is?" George asks, his tone inscrutable. "We're getting food together?"

"Yeah," Dream nods slowly, feeling like he's missing something. "What else would it be?"

George shrugs, and takes a sip of his milkshake, offering no response.

"I suppose if someone did spot us," he begins, bringing his lips away from the straw. "You'd at least get some good fanart out of it."

Dream lets out a surprised laugh. While Dream was certainly much more public about his appreciation of fanart, George did have his own collection going too, one that mostly existed in a long text thread between the two of them, where George would send pieces he found accompanied by the caption *look at this* or *this one is cute :]* or *hot*. And now that they were actually in person together, Dream had caught George more than once looking at something on his phone, a private smile on his face, only for Dream to glance over his shoulder and find that it was art of the two of them. Dream learned not to pry; George would share if he wanted to.

"Yeah," Dream says, grinning. "I'm sure I would."

Soon after that their food arrives, and George wastes no time in reaching across the table and stealing some fries off of Dream's plate. Dream does convince him to share the milkshake at one point (after *much* pleading), but of course the moment they do, Beth comes back over to check on them, and George is so caught off guard some of the milkshake nearly comes back out his nose. Dream laughs so hard that the other patrons actually *do* start to look over at them.

"You are such a dick," George laments, a flush still resting high on his cheeks.

"Oh, come on," Dream insists, laughter finally subsiding. "It was pretty funny."

George moves to kick him in the shin again, but Dream traps his foot between his own, and then they're stuck in a sort of stalemate. Even when he relaxes, George doesn't move back, seemingly content to keep their feet tangled together under the table. Dream tries very hard to stay focused on the meal in front of him, but the feeling of George's ankle pressed up against his own is enough to turn his whole body hot. Wordlessly, George goes back to eating, a barely visible smile on his face.

Dream does his best to appear unaffected, but as the meal wears on, his feelings continue to return to him in sharp jolts, like shock therapy. George will tilt his head to side, or brush some hair off his forehead, and Dream will feel the sudden sting of his desire again. All his synapses were firing, every nerve felt wide awake and frayed, and all Dream could think about was how badly he

wanted to get George underneath him, or maybe on top of him, he couldn't quite be sure. The impulse to reach across the table and touch him is so pressing it's almost painful. Dream puts his hands in his lap and keeps them there.

Because George always loves to get the last word, when Beth comes by later to drop their check, he makes a great show of thanking Dream, talking about how much of a gentleman he is, obvious payback for Dream's little stunt with the milkshake earlier. Dream's ears go hot, and then George actually goes so far as to call him *Clay*, which really shouldn't be allowed in this context. It's completely unfair, the way it turns Dream's insides to jelly.

"Hey," George says, once their waitress is out of earshot again, his voice gone earnest. "This was fun."

Dream looks at him, genuinely surprised. The food was just ok, and the location certainly wouldn't be his first choice for a meal, but after seeing the look on George's face, Dream decides that maybe this could become his favorite restaurant in the world.

"It was," he agrees.

It should be enough. To have George with him, here, just like he always wanted. It should be enough. And yet, looking at George now, his face half-lit by the pink neon around them, pretty like something words didn't even exist for, Dream feels almost mournful. What he's mourning exactly, he can't be sure. His sanity, maybe.

George smiles, and turns his head away, looking out the window towards something Dream cannot see. Between them, the strawberry milkshake begins to drip condensation onto the table. Dream curls his hands into fists, until his nails begin to leave marks. Outside, in the worsening heat, the pavement shimmers.

Chicken Noodle Soup

The small, green stress ball makes steady thumps against Dream's ceiling, up, *thump*, and back down again, into the open palm of his hand. It was a gift from a fan, and every time the ball hits the ceiling, there's a brief moment where the smiley face is staring back down at him, like some weird, passive aggressive joke, almost as if it knows the reason why he's so intent on keeping his mind distracted.

Up, *thump*, and the ball smiles back down at him again. This time, when it lands in his hand, Dream has to resist the urge to chuck it out the window. Instead, he squeezes it really, really hard.

"Sapnap, come on, save me, I'm low, I'm low!"

Dream turns back to his computer, startled. He must've really zoned out, or maybe George just hadn't spoken for a while, because the sudden exclamation makes him jump. On screen, he can see George laughing, his cheeks flushed pink, as his Fortnite character struggles to get behind a tree. He fails, and is shot dead, which prompts him to flop back into his chair, sliding down off of it until he's almost out of frame. Unconsciously, Dream feels a grin tug at his lips. He looks down into his fist. The smiley face ball now looks more like it's grimacing.

He reaches for his phone, typing out a quick message to George.

L ur fortnite skills are TRASH

He watches as George, now in between games, grabs his phone off the desk, careful to keep it off camera. The delay on stream makes it appear like the text comes through instantaneously, before he's even typed it out.

You are quite literally the worst fortnite player I know.

Dream laughs out loud, and he can see George smile to himself on screen. The thrill of a private moment, pulled off in front of thousands of people, sends a pleasant jolt up Dream's spine.

the worst???? He types back, trying to convey his shock and hurt in the amount of question marks used.

Another pause as the George-on-stream looks down at his phone, clearly only half-paying attention to whatever Karl and Sapnap are saying on VC. Dream's phone buzzes twice in his hand as the new messages come through.

Ok not as bad as Sapnap.

But still pretty bad.

Dream grins at the message openly, not caring how silly he might look, sitting there smiling at his phone like an idiot. His other hand goes slack, and the green stress ball falls to the floor, landing with a soft thud. Dream looks down at it, prodding it lightly with his stocking foot as he sends off another series of texts.

take it back

tell me im good at fortnite

now george :(

George doesn't respond right away, looking sufficiently occupied with trying to stay alive in game, and Dream actually pretends to care about other stuff for a bit. He looks down at his keyboard intently. Maybe he should clean it. It's already spotless, but at least it would occupy his mind for a few minutes. He could even stretch it out to five, if he really took his time.

His phone buzzes and Dream turns his head immediately to read.

Have I ever told you how needy you are?

Dream does his best to ignore the sudden twist of heat around his gut at the question. He shifts in his chair, clearing his throat for an audience of no one before he sends off his response.

maybe idk i don't remember

thats irrelevant anyway

im just asking you to acknowledge my very clear and impressive fortnite skills

His foot rolls the ball around a few more times, pressing down onto it lightly while he waits for George's response. His eyes keep flitting between the stream and his phone. He and George spoke every single day, for hours, usually. They saw each other constantly. And yet, the urgency never faded. It didn't matter the context; every time they talked, everything else in Dream's world became secondary. He didn't even bother wondering if that was a normal feeling to have. At this point, he knew better than to ask questions he didn't wanna know the answer to.

Another double-text comes through, lighting up his screen.

Fishing for compliments, Dream?

Tsk tsk

Dream brings up his free hand and takes his thumbnail in between his teeth, biting at it slightly, a bad habit he'd never been able to shake. His other thumb moves across his phone screen with very little thought, as if his body is responding for him.

from you? always

and don't tsk at me over text

This time, he doesn't glance up at the stream. For some reason, it suddenly feels like too much. Beneath his foot, the smiling stress ball looks miserable and crushed. George's response comes quick, despite the fact that, judging by the sounds Dream is hearing, he's still thoroughly engrossed in the game.

You'd prefer I do it in person?

The hot, twisting sensation around his organs grows more brutal. It almost feels like he's being branded. Dream exhales through his teeth, making his thumb damp with spit, and doesn't allow himself to think before he replies.

be more fun that way don't u think?

He spins around in his chair fully now, not even wanting to tempt himself with the option to look at the stream. The sound coming through his speakers seems muffled now, like it's playing from far

away. This time, when his phone buzzes, the vibration shoots straight up through his arm.

True

Some things are more fun in person

His resolve snaps, and Dream turns around. On the screen, George is dead again, but he doesn't seem particularly bothered by it. He's got an easy smile on his face, seemingly resigned to his character's fate. The only indication of any break in his composure is this color resting high on his cheeks.

yeah like what? Dream types back without looking.

George's eyes flit away, and he picks up his phone. Again, the eerie delay throws Dream off, as the text comes through before George has even raised his fingers to the screen.

I don't know

Sure you can think of some :]

A new lobby starts to load, and George's attention slides away again, already laughing at something Sappnap has said. Dream can't even hear it. It all sounds like static in his ears.

He doesn't bother trying to type a response. He knew what George was doing. It was a old dance for the two of them, well-practiced as this point. One of them would say something just bordering on something else, and the other would respond, and back and forth they'd go until the edge suddenly appeared too close and they'd move away again. Except, this time, what George didn't know is that Dream had already fallen.

Dream puts his phone facedown on his desk and presses his hands flat against his eyes. Despite the fact that the only light in his office is coming from his computer, it still all feels too bright. He thinks about going up to his room to lie down, but then immediately throws that idea out. His bed feels markedly unsafe at the moment. It was late, and he was alone, which meant his thoughts were bound to wander. They already had, numerous times, despite his best efforts.

His strength of will had lasted for approximately 6 hours after they'd gotten back from that diner a few nights ago. Night was steadily crawling towards dawn, and Dream found himself in the shower, already half-hard and wanting. He'd finished with George's name on his lips without a second thought, as if it'd been inside of him already and was just waiting for the right time to emerge.

As if there's ever a right time, Dream thinks ruefully. Still - some times were certainly better than others, and Dream wished he had the self control to pick and choose, he really did, but at this point it would be a miracle if he could get through the whole day without doing *something*. He'd tried, actually, for 12 extremely noble hours, but it had just left him feeling backed up and frustrated, to the point where it was almost funny. He knew he was a healthy 22 year old with an active sex drive, but lately he'd been feeling more and more like a teenager again; desperate and sweaty, constantly counting down the seconds until he could be alone again. The only difference was, when he was a teenager, it hadn't felt nearly this intense.

Of course everything needed to be *more* when it came to George. That's just how things were. Dream had never known how to be normal about him.

"-no, I want to tell it, Dream would want me to tell it!" George says on stream. Dream turns around sharply at the sound of his name.

“Uh, no he wouldn’t,” Sapnap cuts in, his tone goading.

“Shut up, no one asked,” George shoots back, giving an exaggerated eye roll to the camera.

“*Anyway* - Dream was trying to give Patches this pill for her eye thing, I don’t know what it is, something to make her see better, I think. And so, he was like-”

George cuts himself off, and Sapnap is laughing too now, all fake arguments discarded. Dream watches as George composes himself, the color on his face deepening.

“He was like putting it in her food, or in these weird little treats with holes in them, I don’t know, but every time he tried - every time! She found the pill and wouldn’t eat it.”

George is beaming, and Dream finds himself mirroring his expression, letting out a chuckle at the memory. It had happened only a day or two ago, and the whole incident hadn’t even stuck out in Dream’s mind, but George looks like he’s having the time of his life telling the story, like it’s something precious he’s taking a great deal of pride in sharing. Dream can’t imagine why; it felt so ordinary, but apparently George treasured it all the same.

“It was so funny,” George says decisively, but when he laughs again, something catches in his throat, and he’s sent off into a coughing fit. Dream frowns. The color in George’s face did look a bit blotchier than usual. Dream was used to seeing him blush, but now the red in his cheeks looks more feverish than flustered.

George takes a quick sip of water (against all odds, the ubiquitous Mr. Beast cup had made the trip over from the UK and was still going strong) and goes back to the game at the imploring of Karl, who is the only one on their team still left alive. Dream watches the screen, eyes fixed on George’s face, as his hand hovers over his phone, debating whether or not to ask if he’s ok. Then he remembers the unfinished conversation awaiting him and he pulls his hand away. Dream turns in his chair again, and with the movement, accidentally sends the stress ball ricocheting across the floor. It lands dejectedly in the corner, upside down, its smile staring unblinking back at Dream. He winces, and resolves to find something else to occupy his hands with until the stream ends.

The moment George begins saying his goodbyes, Dream is out of his chair and closing the stream. He pockets his phone and walks out into the hallway, trying to keep his footsteps quiet for Sapnap’s sake, who seems to have no intention of ending any time soon. When Dream passes by his door, he can hear snatches of a conversation, something about trying to get Karl to join him and Punz in a game of Valo. Dream laughs quietly to himself, and takes the stairs two at a time.

The third floor is quiet, and Dream heads over to George’s room without a second thought. While he still tried to be good about knocking, despite George’s complete disinterest in ever reciprocating that particular courtesy, he forgoes it this time since the door is already slightly ajar.

“Hey, are you feeling ok?” He asks, pushing the door open fully and stepping into the room. George turns to look at him, eyes like saucers, and Dream realizes with a start that his headphones are still on and his monitor is still lit up in front of him. He hadn’t actually ended stream yet. George was still live.

Of course. Dream was an idiot. George always took an absurdly long time to say goodbye to chat, a fact that Dream was well aware of. Maybe he’d just been too distracted to remember.

George’s mouth opens into an *O* shape, and then he shuts it abruptly, letting out a strange, closed-mouth laugh. It sort of sounds like he’s choking.

"I'm fine," he says quietly, as if lowering his voice would somehow prevent his tens of thousands of viewers from hearing him. Dream's eyes flit over to the screen, where he sees chat flying past at a million miles a minute. He tears his eyes away, finding George again.

"Right," he says, unsure of why he suddenly feels so awkward. He and George had been on stream together countless times since his move, even a couple times with Dream physically in the same room as him, and it hadn't felt weird then. Now, however, Dream is struck with the terrifying impression that somehow, everyone knew exactly what was going through his head, like instead of walking in and asking George about his health he'd strolled in and started with, *Hey, so I've been thinking about you while jacking off lately.*

Dream's discomfort must be obvious, because George's expression finally relaxes, amusement entering his eyes, and Dream immediately feels better at the sight, the knot in his stomach slowly untwisting. A small smile begins to appear on George's face, and Dream actually lets out a laugh, realizing how stupid they both must look.

"Say hi to chat, Dream," George says, still looking at him. "Don't be rude."

"Hi," Dream says, but his eyes don't leave George's face. George's smile widens, and he turns back to spare a glance over to the camera, as if he's about to share some great secret with his audience that Dream isn't meant to hear.

"He's just *so* nice isn't he, guys?" George asks, sarcasm coloring his tone. Even though Dream knows it's meant to be a joke, he can't help but notice something buried under George's words, something he can just barely make out, that's teetering on the edge of genuine. "He came to check up on me. So chivalrous!"

Dream scoffs, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his shorts.

"You're a dick," he mutters, only half-hoping chat will hear. George looks over at him again, eyes briefly following the slope of his arms, then down further, to the place where the hem of Dream's shorts meet his thighs. Dream likes this, the sensation of George looking at him while he's just out of frame, like he's there for his eyes only. He leans against the doorframe, titling his head to the side, and George tracks the movement, the curve of his lips sharpening.

"Finish saying goodbye to chat, George," Dream says, a bit louder this time. That one he did sort of want people to hear. George raises his eyebrows.

"He thinks he can tell me what to do!" He says, talking to chat but still looking at Dream. "Did you guys hear that?"

"I can say it louder," Dream says, shrugging easily. "If you think they didn't."

George crosses his arms over his chest, and Dream really thinks he might stream for another hour at this point, just to piss Dream off, but instead he turns back to the camera and resumes his long ritual of signing off. Dream watches him, eyes lingering on his profile, before he turns his face away, scanning the rest of George's room for something less dangerous to focus on.

"Uh, thank you all again for the gifted subs, sorry if I missed any," George continues, his voice taking on a new cadence. Dream's eyes go back to him without thinking. He really did sound different when it was just the two of them.

Dream loved that. He loved that there were parts of George that only *he* had access to. It was the type of thing he simultaneously wanted to hoard close to his chest and brag about to anyone that

would listen. And he already knew he did his fair share of the latter.

“Bye! Bye guys,” George says, laughing slightly as his eyes find Dream again. He looks almost embarrassed, which is so endearing it makes Dream want to scream. “Bye. Bye!”

The stream ends. The room suddenly feels disconcertingly quiet, despite the fact that George’s audience had been entirely silent.

“So,” Dream begins. “Are you actually feeling ok? Cause on stream-”

“I’m fine,” George groans, pushing himself back from his desk and tugging off his headphones. He fixes Dream with an assessing look. “You’re being odd.”

Dream shifts on his feet, body going rigid. Obviously George was just giving him shit for worrying so much. There’s no way he knew about all the other stuff.

“Shut up,” Dream responds gruffly. Then, all at once, he realizes why it’s so quiet. George’s AC is off. Dream frowns, stepping further into the room. It’s *warm*, really warm, and yet George still has a hoodie on. “George, are you cold right now?”

George shrugs, turning back to his computer, trying to look interested in the black screen in front of him.

“A bit,” he says. “I don’t know. I guess I left the AC on too long or something.”

Before George has the chance to protest, Dream comes to kneel in front of his chair. George’s eyes go wide, and he stays completely still as Dream brings his hand up and presses the back of it against George’s forehead. George stares at him, hands going tense over the arms of his chair until Dream can see the bones of his knuckles in stark relief.

“You know, I don’t think the hand-on-forehead thing actually works for determining if someone is sick,” George murmurs.

“Well, we don’t have a thermometer,” Dream says with a shrug. “So I’m making do with what I have.”

“Why don’t we own a thermometer?” George asks, his voice still quiet. “We have, like, three hoverboards and no thermometer?”

“First of all, those hoverboards were your idea. I still think they look dumb,” Dream reminds him. “Second of all, I don’t know, I just never thought to get one before.”

“We have an entire home gym,” George continues, a slow grin emerging on his face. “A hot tub. An *ice cream maker*. And no thermometer.”

“Alright, alright, I get it,” Dream chuckles. “I will buy a thermometer. But, can I just say, this is very hypocritical coming from the guy who now owns multiple Balenciaga hoodies and no raincoat.”

“I’d never use it!” George insists, laughing.

“You lived in England, and now you live here in Florida, where hurricanes happen,” Dream says pointedly. “You need a fucking raincoat.”

“Whatever,” George mutters, rolling his eyes. “At least neither of us spent our money on a gold

chain we're still too scared to wear on stream."

"Hey, Nick said he was gonna do it soon," Dream chides. "Give him time. He needs our support on this journey."

George shoots him an incredulous look and Dream manages to keep a straight face for all of two seconds before the two of them dissolve into shared laughter.

"God," Dream begins after he's caught his breath. "This is so embarrassing. We're like a little kid's idea of what rich people are."

"Well, other rich people are boring," George states. "What else should we be spending our money on?"

"Thermometers, apparently," Dream answers with a smirk. His hand lingers on George's forehead for another moment before he finally lowers it. Maybe it's his imagination, but his skin does feel hotter where they touched. "You sure you're alright?"

"I'm fine," George repeats again, his smile softening. "But you do owe me 100 subs for interrupting my stream."

"Please, my presence *enhanced* your stream," Dream insists. "I bet everyone on Twitter is talking about how I came to check on you. I bet it's trending already."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" George asks teasingly. "Everyone thinking I swooned in your arms and now you're taking care of me."

Dream lets out a surprised laugh, sinking back to sit on his heels. George's expression is light, but there's something heavier lingering back behind his eyes, making Dream uneasy. Dream furrows his brow.

"George, you're my best friend," he says, trying not to dwell too much on how his mouth goes dry around the words. "If you were sick, I *would* take care of you."

George shifts in his chair slightly, his shoulders crawling closer to his ears, as if he's raising his hackles. Dream's confusion must be evident, because George's shoulders quickly drop and then he's smiling at Dream tightly, in a way that doesn't quite reach his eyes.

"Well, I'm not," he says, turning his face away again. "I feel fine."

Dream nods, reluctantly rising to his feet.

"Ok, but I'm still ordering a thermometer," Dream says, and George actually does smile at that, a real one that makes his eyes crinkle at the edges. Dream grins, feeling like he's just won something.

"Which kind?" George asks, hands coming together to rest idly in his lap. It takes a moment for the implications of the question to register, but once they do, Dream snorts and raises a hand, knocking his knuckles lightly against George's jaw like the world's slowest and weakest punch. George giggles, finally tilting his eyes up to look at Dream again.

"You're an idiot," Dream says.

"Just wondering where I'll be expected to put it," George says, feigning innocence.

"Funny," Dream deadpans. "Sometimes I wonder how it's possible that you're the oldest."

“Yes, because you and Sapnap are such beacons of maturity,” George scoffs. Dream laughs again, and George seems to brighten at the sound, and then they’re doing that thing again where they’re just smiling at each other and not saying anything. Dream ducks his head down self-consciously, abruptly breaking the spell.

“You going to bed or staying up?” He asks, still looking at the floor. George watches him, his gaze focused on Dream in that way that always made him feel like he was being studied rather than simply observed.

“Bed,” George finally says, standing from his chair. Dream watches silently as he turns around and takes down his green screen, and then he finds himself wanting to stay longer, watch George go through all the motions of getting ready for bed. They’re physically closer than ever, and yet, Dream still finds himself missing the casual moments of intimacy they used to have over calls, back when they’d spent 8, 10, 12 hours on the phone together. Back before there were doors to close between them. Back before Dream had become so aware of his own hands.

“I should-” He stops himself, and George looks up at him, expression unguarded. Immediately, Dream wants to chase after that openness, see how far it’ll get them. Instead, he steps back, offering a smile. “I should sleep too, I think.”

“Ok,” George says, nodding thoughtfully. “Will you, though?”

Dream thinks it’s the type of thing he’s supposed to laugh at, but he realizes it a moment too late, so he just sort of coughs instead, trying to fill the silence with *something*. George eyes him strangely, and Dream’s almost positive George can see it now, considering how obvious he’s being. It might as well be smeared all over his face.

“I’ll try,” Dream says in a way he hopes sounds casual, flippant. “Night, George.”

He doesn’t wait for a response, just turns around and heads towards the door. Even as he’s leaving, he can hear George wish him goodnight, so quiet Dream might as well have imagined it.

3 A.M. settles heavily over the house and Dream’s mind returns to the same place it always does once he’s left alone. It’s dark and unnaturally cool in his room, the type of chill that can only be produced by an AC running on high, and Dream is lying on top of his covers, one hand resting flat against his stomach. Normally, Patches would be here to keep him company, but she’s off somewhere else, and his room feels unsettlingly empty in her absence.

He wants to knock himself out, skip over the whole process of actually falling asleep, because that’s where trouble always finds him. He’ll shut his eyes, determined to turn his brain off, but the moment his guard slips, he’s flooded with desire, so sudden and urgent it leaves him feeling nauseous. Earlier that night, he’d googled “meditation for sleep” and he’s trying one of those methods now, counting his breaths in and out and trying to force his brain to become blank. Breath 132 comes and goes. He flexes his hand against his stomach and imagines it was George’s instead. His eyes shoot open and he loses count again.

“Shit,” he says quietly, if only to remind himself that he can still say stuff out loud, that he isn’t entirely trapped in his own head. As if guided by some other force, the hand moves lower, towards the waistband of his shorts. He thinks about the way George had looked at him earlier, the places where his eyes lingered, and the hand sinks lower still. It’d never been this easy before, either. Normally, Dream needed *some* sort of stimulation to get himself worked up. Now, it felt like he was never any more than two seconds away from being painfully hard, just like he was now. It was

embarrassing, really. Or, it would be, if it didn't feel so damn good.

Dream palms himself through the fabric of his shorts, trying to sink back into the feeling of restraint, not give himself everything all at once. It's a valiant effort, but ultimately a doomed one, as the heavy press of his palm grows more insistent and Dream grinds up against his hand.

So eager, a voice in his head pipes up, and Dream doesn't have to imagine who it belongs to.

Why are you difficult even in my fantasies? Dream thinks, frustration balling up like a fist at the base of his spine, leaving him restless and straining against his own grip.

Cause you like me that way, the voice, the George-in-his-head replies, and Dream bites back a sigh, sliding his shorts off and touching himself fully now, his cock already flushed and weeping. That was the worst part, really. There was actually very little fantasy involved. It was just *George*, as he already was. That was enough.

His grip is too slack, and the air in the room feels abrasive and dry against his skin, but despite this, Dream feels himself growing close almost immediately. His mind, which he wanted so badly to render thoughtless mere moments ago, is overwhelmed with images. George, and his hands splayed out over Dream's chest, wrapped around his cock, tugging at his hair. George, pressing his soft pink lips against the concave of Dream's thigh, looking down at him through heavily lidded eyes as Dream takes him in his mouth, how he'd gasp, how he'd rut up against him, how he'd taste on Dream's tongue. Dream's back arches up, and he pumps himself frantically, desperate to finish while also wishing that he could stay here, in this world he'd created in his mind where George would let him do things like that, would *want* him in that way.

I do, the George-in-his-head says, his voice so real it might as well be a recording playing in Dream's brain. *I want you. I want you, Dream.*

Dream gasps, and he's tumbling over, chasing the aftershocks of his orgasm until his body feels boneless and worn out. He doesn't let himself linger there, instead getting up immediately and grabbing a handful of tissues from the box on his bedside table. He cleans himself efficiently, a dizzy detachment settling over him, like the body he's wiping off isn't his own. He throws the tissues away and doesn't let his focus linger anywhere in particular as he tugs on a pair of sweatpants and drops back into his bed, hoping for exhaustion to finally catch up with him.

It almost does. His eyes are starting to drift shut, thoughts dipping peacefully into incoherency, when suddenly, a shout sounds from downstairs, piercing the silence like a dart.

Dream is up in a second, his brain working on auto-pilot as he rushes downstairs, almost tripping over himself in haste. He gets all the way to the first floor, where he sees some movement in the kitchen, despite the fact that the room is entirely dark. When he walks in and flicks on the overhead light, Sapnap whips around in surprise.

"Jesus Christ!" He exclaims. "He scared the shit out of me!"

He points an accusing finger towards the sink, where Dream finally spots George, standing there and staring intently at the faucet, an empty cup held loosely in his hand.

"What's going on?" Dream asks, shoulders sagging with relief as he realizes no real danger is present.

"He was just standing here in the dark when I walked in," Sapnap says, shuddering. "Looked like the fucking Blair Witch."

Dream approaches cautiously, laying a gentle hand on George's shoulder. George turns to look up at him, blinking slowly. His face has gone a worrying shade of white, and there's a thin sheen of sweat on his forehead.

"George?" Dream prompts, his thumb rubbing small circles in the fabric of George's t-shirt. Even at this distance, he can feel the heat radiating off of him in waves.

"Our sink is broken," George says, his expression verging on a pout. Dream looks at the faucet, confused. Then, with his free hand, he reaches out and actually turns it on, adjusting the handle to the right so the water runs cool. George doesn't react. Dream turns around to look at Sapnap, his brow furrowed.

"I think he has a fever," he says. Sapnap stares at him blankly.

"Yeah, no shit, Dream," he responds drily. "He just tried to turn the sink on with his mind."

Dream rolls his eyes, and turns back to George once more, slowly taking the cup from his hand and filling it with water. He turns the sink off and begins guiding George towards the door, one arm now wrapped firmly around his shoulders. George goes willingly, and Sapnap gives them a wide berth, hands out in front of him.

"Oh, fuck no, stay back," he cautions. "I *cannot* get sick. Last time I had a fever I didn't get better for a week. My immune system cannot handle that shit, bro."

"I'm sure it's fine," Dream insists, but even as he says it, his stomach gives a nervous lurch. George really did look out of it. Instinctually, his arm tightens, drawing George even further into his side. Dream tries to recall any tips he might've picked up from his mom about tending to someone when they're sick. He wishes it wasn't so late, so he could just call her and grill her on all the home remedies she used to use on him.

"I want water," George pipes up, neck craning to look back at the sink.

"I got it right here, George," Dream assures, shooting Sapnap one last look before finally leading George out of the room. "Come on, let's get you back into bed."

George nods, and distantly Dream thinks about how it shouldn't be this easy. George was always poking at him, never acquiescing fully, and now he seems completely devoid of that spark. Immediately, Dream wishes for it back, so George could crack some joke about Sapnap's paranoia or give Dream shit for holding him so close to his chest. He doesn't, though. He just lets Dream lead him quietly up the stairs, all the way back into his room.

Dream moves to set the glass of water down on the table, reluctant to even take his hands off George for a moment, as if the second they aren't in contact George will disappear. Luckily, he's already dressed in pajamas, so Dream doesn't have to negotiate any sort of wardrobe change. George waits for him in the middle of the room, that same distant expression on his face, though he does seem a bit more aware of his surroundings now.

"Hey," Dream murmurs, coming to stand in front of him again. "I'm gonna call my mom in the morning, ask her to bring over some stuff, alright? If it gets really bad we can call the doctor--"

"No," George insists, taking a step back. His balance is clearly thrown off, cause he stumbles, and Dream needs to quickly reach forward to grab his shoulders.

"Whoa, whoa," he cautions, chuckling slightly. "No sudden movements, please, I don't need you getting a concussion on top of everything else."

George's eyes go soft and his hands come up to grab onto Dream's wrists, two sudden, scorching points of contact. Then, a second too late, George seems to realize what he's done, his expression morphing into guarded confusion.

"No," he repeats again, senselessly. "No, I'm fine."

"George!" Dream exclaims, genuine frustration starting to creep into his voice. "You are so clearly not. Would you just stop being difficult?"

"How many times do I have to tell you," George begins sharply, letting go of Dream's wrists. "I'm-"

"Fine?" Dream interrupts, scoffing. "George, you're burning up, you're clearly delirious, you-you can barely stand upright! Saying you're fine is such bullshit, don't try and lie. What good would that do?"

George stares up at him, expression torn between anger and the exhaustion Dream knows is sitting heavy inside of him, making his eyes look bloodshot. He presses his lips together in what Dream assumes is meant to be a show of irritation, but even that small move of strength makes his jaw tremble. *Jesus*. He's really sick.

All of Dream's anger immediately melts away and he steps closer to George, bringing his hands up from his shoulders and instead cupping his jaw, trying to quell the trembling.

"I wanna help you get better, George, please," Dream says, his voice bordering on pleading. "Just...let me take care of you, ok?"

Some recognition crosses George's expression, and his lips part, all of the tension seeming to drain out of him in one, shaky breath. The AC is still off, and in the muggy silence Dream swears he can hear every shift of fabric, every small catch in George's throat when he swallows. He feels like an animal trying to find its way in the dark, like all his other senses have been heightened. George smells like sweat and mint toothpaste and his skin is impossibly hot. It makes with Dream wanna lean in and lick a stripe up his neck, to see what kind of taste George would leave behind on his tongue. Instead, he rubs his thumbs in soft circles in the hollow of George's cheeks, putting all his intention into that one tiny gesture. When George looks up to meet Dream's gaze, his eyelashes flutter.

"Please, just-" Dream begins, suddenly unsure. "Just tell me what you need."

George eyes rake across his face. For a moment, it seems like there's no air between them at all. Dream's vision tunnels, and he realizes with startlingly clarity that, maybe, that's the question he should've been asking all along.

George tips forward, just slightly, his center of gravity shifting, and Dream can feel himself following when, suddenly, George brings a hand up, places it firmly against Dream's chest, and *shoves*. Before Dream can even react, George runs into the en-suite bathroom, doubles over the toilet, and throws up.

Dream stands there, looking at the space between his hands where George just was. It takes a moment for his brain to start working again, but the second it does, he's rushing off to follow George, moving into the bathroom to stand beside him and holding the hair away from his face as he's sick again.

George doesn't speak much after that. Dream helps him rinse out his mouth, and then George slinks back under the covers of his bed, his expression dull, eyes distant. His face has taken on a pale, almost green-ish hue, and he curls up tightly, his body shrinking until he looks about half his usual size. It breaks Dream's heart.

Dream sinks down beside him on the bed without a second thought, fingers looping around George's wrist like an anchor-point, and calls his mom. He knows it's late, and he leads with about a million hushed apologies about this fact once she picks up, but all of a sudden he feels desperate for her voice, for confirmation from an actual adult that he isn't doing something wrong. She soothes him, despite the exhaustion in her voice, and asks him to guide her through George's symptoms. She's not a doctor by any means, but she saw her kids through their fair share of ailments. If there's anyone Dream trusts to know what to do, it's her.

Beside him, George curls into himself even further. Dream feels a hand come up and rest on his thigh, but when he turns to look, George's eyes are still scrunched shut. The hand on his leg stays there. Maybe George doesn't even know what he's doing. Maybe he just wanted to reach for something and Dream happened to be there.

"It's probably just the flu, love," his mother's voice brings him out of his thoughts. Dream chews on his lower lip, the dry skin breaking and leaving a coppery taste in his mouth.

"You sure?" Dream asks. "Maybe I should bring him to a doctor, or I don't know, call someone to-"

"Clay," she interrupts, her voice patient and kind. "Make sure he has enough fluids. Keep him cool. I'll be by in the morning with some supplies, alright?"

Dream exhales through his mouth, into the dark stillness of the room. George shifts, and the fingers on Dream's thigh tighten, small imprints left in the fabric of his sweatpants. The slight pressure grounds him, makes Dream feel less like he's gonna crawl out of his skin with worry. Even when George is totally out of it, somehow he still manages to make Dream feel better.

"Alright," he concedes.

"He's gonna be fine, bunny," she murmurs. Dream feels his ears go hot at the childhood nickname. She hadn't called him that in years.

"Thanks, mom," he says. "I love you."

"Love you too. Now get some sleep, both of you."

Once they hang up, Dream just sits there for a moment, unsure of what to do. He wants to stay, obviously, but that seems like the sort of thing he should ask George about first. Maybe he could just post up in his desk chair for the night, keep an eye on George while he sleeps. There was no way Dream was gonna leave him alone, not in this state.

Then, George stirs, and when Dream turns to him, he's surprised to see a small smile on his face. George's eyes open, just barely, and they find Dream easily.

"Ha," he mumbles. "Bunny."

Dream gapes down at him, before a laugh blooms out of his chest, so relieved George can still *speak*, can still joke around. It makes him feel a million times lighter.

"You're delirious," Dream insists, sinking down further into the bed, until he's only half-sitting up

beside George. "You didn't hear anything."

"Hm, I did though," George replies, still grinning. Even though he knows George is never gonna let him live this down, Dream can't really bring himself to care. He's just happy to see him smiling.

"I thought you were going to sleep," he murmurs. George's brow creases, and he looks like he wants to say something, but then he sets his lips together again. The hand on Dream's thigh flexes, stays there. This time, George doesn't have to say anything. Dream already knows what he wants.

Slowly, he adjusts his posture so he's lying down properly, still on top of the covers. George's expression relaxes, and his eyes slide shut again. Dream smiles to himself, knowing that he's made the right choice.

"Want the AC on?" He asks after a moment, realizing how stuffy the room is becoming. George nods, and the hand on Dream's thigh is finally lifted. Dream gets up and pads across the room quietly. The AC comes on with a sputtering whir and a rush of cool air follows. George tucks himself deeper under his blankets, until only his head is poking out. This time, when Dream returns to the bed, he climbs under the covers on the other side. There's a fleeting moment where Dream considers trying to keep up the pretense of personal space, but then George is curling his body towards him, and Dream reaches for him without a second thought. It's like their first night in the house all over again; George, pressed up against Dream's chest, and Dream wrapping his arms around him, keeping him close. It's amazing how few words need to be exchanged. Dream simply murmurs a soft "You good?" against George's hair, and George nods, and that's that. It's that simple.

George snakes his foot forward under the covers, hooking it around Dream's ankle. His skin is tacky with dried sweat, and as he begins to drift off, his mouth goes slack against the front of Dream's t-shirt, leaving a wet mark of drool there. He's warm and his breathing is even, so in sync with Dream's that it feels like he's holding his own heart in his hands. In some ways, he supposes he is.

Dream isn't sure how long he lies there, trying his best to stay awake and observant. He's waiting for some change in George's composure, some indication that he's getting worse, but none comes. When he does finally fall asleep, it feels like he's stepping over the threshold of a familiar house; like he's being welcomed back, and George is already there waiting for him on the other side.

Dream's mom does come by the next morning and brings what looks like the contents of an entire CVS with her. Once Dream rouses himself and goes downstairs, leaving George fast asleep in bed, it's all been piled onto the kitchen island, and Sapnap is eyeing it warily, like one of the double-layered plastic bags might contain a bomb.

"I take it your mom knows George is sick," Sapnap says by way of greeting when Dream walks in.

"Yeah," Dream confirms a bit sheepishly. "George threw up last night, so I sort of panicked and called her."

Sapnap nods, and without a word, begins unpacking the various supplies. He may not have been willing to be as hands-on as Dream, but he was certainly trying to help, which Dream appreciated, especially considering how out of his depth he felt. It takes a few minutes, but soon everything is laid out in front of them, and Dream is able to take stock of it all. There are two bottles of ibuprofen, a couple different kind of cough medicine, a heating pad, cough drops, Tums, a six-pack of blue Gatorade and, weirdly enough, a pair of fuzzy socks. There's also the other bag his mom

had dropped off, the one not from the drugstore, which was filled to brim with ingredients. Ingredients that Sapnap and Dream are now staring at, neither of them quite comprehending what they're seeing.

"She said it was to make soup," Sapnap says. "Chicken noodle, I think."

"Huh," Dream nods, picking up a small plastic carton of herbs and examining it. "I've never made soup from scratch before."

"Why would you?" Sapnap snorts. "The canned stuff is just as good."

Dream shrugs. He can't recall a time where his mom had gone out of her way to make homemade soup for him or his siblings when they were sick, so this was a bit odd. And yet - Dream still finds himself wanting to try. It would be nice, to do something a bit more special for George when he was feeling so shitty. Dream tugs out his phone, planning to ask his mom about it, but there's already a text from her waiting for him.

Heard you've been doing a lot of cooking for someone. Thought some soup would be nice :)

Dream blanches. *How the hell did she find that out?* His mind is immediately filled with a terrifying image of his mom and George texting each other and gossiping about his skills in the kitchen behind his back, but then he remembers that he mentioned it off-handedly to his sister at one point, and that idea is (thankfully) scrubbed from this mind. Dream types out a quick thank you, his neck still feeling hot.

"What is that?" Sapnap asks, gesturing towards another plastic container.

"Uh, bay leaves, I think," Dream says, though he's really just going off the name on the label. He has no idea what purpose they actually serve. In fact, they look more like something you'd find on someone's lawn than something you'd ever wanna put into your food.

"And that?" Sapnap asks again. Dream follows his gaze, picking up the small, gnarled root in front of them.

"Ginger," he says, rotating it in his hands like he's trying to plan the best method of attack. Next to him, Sapnap nods sagely.

"Yeah," he finally says, patting Dream firmly on the back. "Just make the canned shit."

Dream puts all the food away properly, not wanting to leave anything out on the counter for too long, and then grabs as much medicine as he can carry before heading back up to George's room. He grabs the fuzzy socks too. They can't hurt to have.

George is awake when Dream re-enters, but he's still entirely horizontal, like he might go back to sleep at any moment. There's a bit more color in his face now though, which Dream takes as a good sign.

"Hey," he greets, setting everything down carefully on the bed. "My mom brought...uh, she sort of brought everything."

"You told her?" George murmurs, his voice scratchy. Dream nods, sitting down on the bed beside the pile of stuff.

"Yeah," Dream says, unsure of how much he should disclose. George didn't sound mad, obviously, but Dream still felt a bit self-conscious, suddenly embarrassed by just how worried he'd

been. He settles for a half-joke, familiar territory for the two of them. “Just wanted to get a second opinion on whether or not you were dying.”

“Not dying,” George confirms, rolling over on his stomach and stuffing his face into his pillow. The next words come out muffled. “But I wish I was.”

Dream laughs, but couples this with reaching forward and running a hand through George’s hair, a simple gesture of comfort. George seems to relax at the touch, his head slowly re-emerging as he turns to look over at Dream.

“You should eat something,” Dream says. “And then take some medicine.”

“Toast,” George mutters. “I think the only thing I can stomach is toast.”

Dream nods, extremely grateful George has given him such a specific task. The daunting undertaking of trying to make that soup could wait; there was plenty he could do in the meantime.

“Ok, toast it is,” Dream agrees. “Anything else? I take requests, you know.”

George smiles, half of his mouth still hidden by the pillow. He seems to consider the offer for a moment, pursing his lips as he thinks.

“Patches,” he finally says decisively. “I’d like her too, please.”

Dream grins. Patches was always Dream’s first source of comfort when he wasn’t feeling well. It was sweet that he and George now had that in common.

“I’ll hunt her down,” Dream says. His hand is still resting in George’s hair, and he makes even strokes through it, appreciating the soft texture between his fingers. George hums, eyes sliding shut. Usually, Dream’s desire felt almost anxious, like he was never sure when it was going to creep up on him and leave him feeling flustered and guilty again. Now, however, it feels less frightening. More comforting, as strange as that sounds, resting lower in his belly like a well-kept flame, not quite blazing but still burning, still alive. He feels warmed by it. Not so afraid anymore.

“Dream?” George asks quietly. Dream’s fingers scratch lightly at his skull, eliciting a happy sigh from George’s throat.

“Yeah?”

“I’m definitely gonna throw up again.”

This time, George has the foresight to grab a headband, but Dream still stays beside him the entire time, rubbing even circles on his back. Dream knows it’s not exactly necessary that he’s there, but still. He stays anyway.

George is up and down from his bed for the rest of the day. He’s either coughing, or gagging over the toilet, or lying down and nibbling miserably at the piece of toast Dream brought him. Dream does manage to find Patches as well, and once she’s placed on George’s bed she settles down without a problem, only stirring when George gets up to go to the bathroom again.

Dream realizes he’s being a bit of a mother hen, but George doesn’t complain, and he certainly doesn’t see any reason to stop. He makes a routine out of it; helping George to the bathroom when needed, getting him water, going down to the kitchen occasionally to grab more toast. They don’t

even talk that much, but when night falls and George is back under his covers, Dream joins him without a second thought, and they fall asleep together again, heads resting on the same pillow, angled towards each other like children sharing a secret.

The first 24 hours are the worst. After that, things start to get a bit easier.

The next morning, George is actually able to sit up in bed and get a whole piece of toast down as opposed to just a couple of bites. Dream feels safe enough to leave for a bit, just to shower and get changed, and when he returns George has his laptop propped up on his knees and is watching the third Harry Potter movie, Patches purring contentedly on his chest.

“Haven’t you seen this movie, like, five times already?” Dream asks, settling in beside him. He leans against George’s shoulder, bringing a hand up and petting Patches’s soft fur.

“It’s the best one,” George says. He’s still running a bit hotter than usual, but he seems much more himself, so the fever has clearly waned at least a bit. Dream actually had ended up getting a thermometer (he had a new appreciation for rush one-day shipping now) but he still felt the urge to occasionally press his hand against George’s forehead, like he wanted to judge for himself. This time, when he does it, George casts a sideways look at him, and Dream grins sheepishly, feeling caught.

“How do you feel?” He asks, which had become a repeating refrain over the past day or so.

“Ok,” George says, and Dream’s glad he’s being more honest now, no longer so insistent on trying to brush off Dream’s concern. “Tired. But I haven’t thrown up in a while, so I suppose that’s something.”

“It is,” Dream assures. George opens his mouth to speak again, but a coughing fit overtakes him. Dream moves to grab him the glass of water that’s sitting on the bedside table, holding it out for him. George accepts it, taking a few careful sips until the coughing dies down.

“Ugh,” George groans, setting the glass down beside him again. “I hate this.”

“I know,” Dream says. “But you’re gonna start feeling better soon. I promise.”

George sighs, sinking further into Dream’s side, until the two of them are slotted against each other and Dream is at the perfect angle to rest his chin on top of George’s head. He does, and brings his arm up to wrap around George’s shoulders, the position coming to them naturally, like their bodies were always meant to be together, like this.

It’d never been like that before with anyone else. Dream was so used to things being effortful. In fact, that’s sort of how he thought things were *supposed* to be. He wasn’t used to things coming naturally. Everything in life - his career, his Minecraft abilities, cultivating a presence online, it had all taken so much time and energy and practice, and even still, he felt like there was always something he could be improving on, something new he could learn.

And while there was plenty more he wanted with George, that same fear of inadequacy simply didn’t trouble him here. There was no *wrong* way to do this, to be with him. It feels like a revelation, but maybe it wasn’t. Maybe it was just Dream accepting what had been true all along. However they two of them fell together, it’d always end up fitting. That’s just how they were built.

Between them, Patches stretches out, her paws flexing. George looks down at her, a smile coming over his face.

“She’s so happy,” he murmurs, scratching behind her ears. Patches, as if in confirmation of this

statement, begins to purr, nuzzling her face further into George's chest. Dream smiles, even though he knows George can't see it, and the two of them watch the movie in comfortable silence. George's curtain is open, and light floods into the room, slanting in so when Dream looks up he can see particles of dust dancing through the air. Everything is still. When George drifts off an hour or so into the film, sagging back against Dream's chest, Dream plants a soft kiss against the crown of his head and lets him sleep, despite the fact that the position renders him completely immobile. At that moment, Dream couldn't care less. There was no where else he'd rather be.

At first, Dream tries looking up a recipe online. The results are troubling. Some of them involve *bones*, which, what the hell, Dream was certainly not about to tear apart an entire chicken with his bare hands. There were some other ones that looked simpler, but still used a bunch of words Dream didn't recognize (how the hell was he supposed to "reduce" something?) or called for all sorts of other procedures, like leaving the soup to slow cook for hours. Dream knew he didn't have the patience for that sort of thing, so he just decides to wing it. It couldn't be *that* hard. Besides, he already had all the ingredients. He just needed to trust his instincts or whatever. Chefs did that all the time. At least, he's pretty sure they did.

Sapnap finds him there in the kitchen an hour later, standing in front of the stove and staring intently at the biggest pot they own, waiting for the broth to start boiling. He comes up beside him, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I'm pretty sure there's a saying about this," Sapnap says, a smirk on his face. "Something about a watched pot."

"Shut up," Dream replies.

Sapnap actually does end up keeping him company for a bit, and he doesn't even give him that much shit about how much work he's putting into the soup. Sapnap still teased Dream about most things when it came to George - how much time they spent together, how willing Dream was to get him stuff just cause George asked, how they acted in calls together. But ever since the move, there were some things that Sapnap seemed more reluctant to poke at. The cooking was one of those things. Even Dream could kind of see why. There wasn't much humor to be found in it, and Sapnap didn't often like dwelling on heavy things. It was clear how much Dream cared, and when Dream really cared about something, Sapnap respected it, no matter how silly he might've thought it was. Dream had always appreciated that about him.

Usually, Dream felt protective of Sapnap. He was younger than him, after all, and Dream felt partially responsible for all the eyes that were on him, all the scrutiny he received. If he hadn't come with Dream, he probably would've been able to avoid most, if not all of it, and that thought made Dream wanna shield him, keep him safe. But then, Sapnap was also plenty protective of him. Or, more specifically, of his heart. He'd seen Dream at his lowest, and though they'd never talked about it directly, Dream knew how much Sapnap wanted to make sure he never reached those points again. There were plenty of things that went unspoken between them, but Dream knew deep down that if something made him happy, Sapnap would support it, even if he never said it out loud.

They talk about plenty of other stuff though. Sapnap sits on one of the bar stools and tears the extra parsley into little bits, leaving a small pile in front of him, while they go back and forth on video ideas. Sapnap is insistent they do a road-trip vlog up to North Carolina to visit Karl, and he's already started planning their stops along the way.

"There are like, actual haunted houses in Savannah. With real ghosts in them," he says.

“That’s an oxymoron,” Dream scoffs, picking up the wooden spoon beside him and stirring the broth a bit.

“You’re an oxymoron,” Sapnap shoots back. “Anyway, what I’m saying is I think we should stay in a haunted hotel. And we can shoot a mini vlog where you, me and George try to hunt a ghost.”

“Hunt a ghost?” Dream asks, turning around to throw an incredulous look at him. Sapnap nods earnestly.

“Yes! We can buy equipment and everything.”

“I thought you were scared of ghosts,” Dream says, grabbing a bit of the crushed up ginger and throwing it into the pot, hoping it’s an appropriate amount. He didn’t measure it out or anything, but he’s sure it’s fine.

“Oh, I’m fucking terrified,” Sapnap assures. “But anything for the vlog, right?”

Dream laughs. “Yeah, alright. Dream Team ghost hunting vlog. Why the hell not?”

Sapnap grins in victory, and then he tugs out his phone, shooting off a quick text. Immediately, Dream realizes this was probably something he and George had already been conspiring on and were just waiting for the right time to spring on him. Dream shakes his head with a grin, and goes back to watching his broth.

When he comes up to George’s room a bit later, his suspicions are confirmed as George looks up at him from his phone with a knowing smile on his face.

“Ghost hunting?” He asks. His voice is still a bit raw, but he doesn’t sound as fatigued anymore, and the color has slowly started returning to his cheeks. His hair is all mused from where he was lying on it, and Dream is grateful his hands are full, or else he’d be unable to resist reaching out and smoothing it all back into place.

“You two are so dumb,” Dream says with a laugh, sitting down carefully on the bed as he balances the bowl of soup in his hands. “What do you think we’re actually gonna find?”

“Nothing,” George says with a shrug. “But it’s gonna get, like, a million views easy. We’re marketing geniuses, Dream. Keep up.”

“Hey, I agreed, didn’t I?” Dream points out. George’s smile deepens, and then he seems to notice that Dream has something in his hands. He frowns, leaning forward slightly.

“What is that?” He asks.

“Uh, it’s soup,” Dream says, feeling a bit awkward all of a sudden. “I made it. For you.”

George nods, accepting the bowl when Dream hands it to him. He looks down at it inquisitively.

“Did you...did you make this from scratch?” He asks, surprise evident. Dream nods. Something unreadable crosses George’s expression, and without another word, he picks up the spoon and starts eating. It’s the first thing besides toast that he’s had in days, but the lack of hesitation makes Dream think he’s more than ready for it, probably tired from eating an endless stream of bread. Dream sits there and lets George eat for a bit, before he finally works up the courage to ask how it is.

“I...” George hesitates, the spoon half-way to his mouth. “I really like it, Dream. Thank you.”

The words shoot straight through him, leaving Dream glowing. He ducks his head down, trying to hide the breadth of the smile on his face.

“Good,” he says. “Can I, uh, can I try it? I actually didn’t taste it before I brought it up here, and I’ve never made soup before.”

George looks at him for a moment, holding the bowl almost protectively. He looks like he’s going to protest, but then, very slowly, he extends his arms out and passes the bowl to Dream. Dream chuckles.

“I promise I won’t eat it all,” he assures, charmed by George’s reluctance. He must really like it. Forgoing the spoon, Dream raises the rim of the bowl to his lips and sips.

The second the broth touches his tongue he almost spits it right back out.

“Oh my God!” He exclaims. “This is *awful!*”

And it really is. The broth is way too gingery, to the point where it almost hurts to swallow, and it’s overly salty too. None of the vegetables ended up cooked properly, so they’re weirdly hard, while the noodles are all soggy from being boiled for too long. It’s a colossal failure, so bad Dream is shocked he didn’t notice just by looking at it.

George is watching him carefully, chewing on the inside of his cheek, a guilty expression on his face. Dream stares at him in open shock.

“George, why are you eating this?” He asks, letting out a stunned laugh. “It’s terrible.

“Yeah, it’s not great, but...” George shrugs, eyes suddenly darting away. “You made it for me, so.”

Dream swallows, the heavy taste of salt lingering on his tongue. George still won’t meet his eyes. He looks almost embarrassed, even though Dream is pretty sure *he’s* the one who should be feeling bad right now.

“I thought...” He trails off. “I mean, I thought you just liked my cooking cause it’s good. Or, usually good, I guess. I didn’t...I didn’t think you cared that it was *mine*.”

George finally meets his gaze, looking faintly troubled. Now, Dream desperately wishes his hands were free, so he could reach forward and smooth the crease that’s emerged in the space between his brows.

“I care,” George murmurs. “I care that it’s yours.”

“But...” Dream begins, grasping for the right words. “That doesn’t make sense. You’d eat something I made for you even if it was bad?”

George nods, seeming a bit less hesitant this time, a bit more sure of himself.

“Yes,” he says. “It doesn’t always have to be good, Dream. I don’t care if it’s good.”

“You should,” Dream says, but even as he says it, he’s unsure of why he’s pushing this so hard.

“Well, I don’t,” George says, an air of authority in his voice, like he’s just settled this for the both of them.

That’s the part that didn’t make sense. People were supposed to care if he was good. He was

supposed to be good. That was the whole point. When he stopped being good, when he stopped making stuff that was good, or worthy, the love would stop too. It was a simple equation. Dream had figured that out a long time ago.

But now, George is looking at him expectantly, hands reaching for the bowl, and all of Dream's calculations suddenly seem completely off. There was no question in George's eyes, no hesitation. He wanted what Dream gave him, even if it wasn't perfect, even if it wasn't always *good*. That realization reorients Dream's entire world. He'd never been loved like that before. And Dream knows it's love, without George even having to say it. He just knows.

Slowly, Dream leans forward, not placing the bowl in George's hands but instead setting it down on the bedside table beside them. Then, he grabs George's hands and tugs him forward. He falls against Dream's chest with a soft *oof*, and Dream wraps his arms around him in a tight hug. George lets out a muffled laugh against his shoulder, bringing his own arms up without question and looping them around Dream's waist, holding him there.

"You're gonna get sick if you keep touching me, you know," George says against his neck.

"I don't care," Dream says. "And I'm gonna make you better soup."

George laughs again, his breath tickling Dream's ear. He pulls back, just slightly, to look Dream in the eye.

"You don't need to do that," he insists.

"Too bad," Dream says with a shrug. "Cause I'm gonna try again. And again, and again, and again--"

He punctuates his words with a pinch to George's ribs, and George giggles, shoving at his chest. Dream is so happy he feels like he might burst clean open, cleft right in half by how George makes him feel. He doesn't care how obvious it is. In fact, he wishes it was *more* obvious. It's insane that there are people out there who don't know. He needs to do a door-to-door campaign, make sure every single person in the world knows how incredible George is, how amazing it feels to be loved by him.

"Ok, ok," George concedes, hands coming to rest over Dream's own, stilling them against his sides. "Can I finish the soup, though?"

Dream glances at it thoughtfully for a moment.

"Fuck no, that shit tasted like ass. We're ordering take out," he says, and George laughs again.

"Fine," he agrees with a very put-upon sigh. "But I'm picking the place."

George ends up settling on a sushi restaurant nearby with good miso soup, and they eat it together up in his room once it arrives, knocking elbows and trying their best not to spill it on the bed. They only partially succeed.

"Will you tell me a story?"

Dream cranes his neck around to look at George. They're lying in George's bed, and evening is fast approaching, the sun already partially behind the horizon, leaving the sky a wash of orange and pink outside the window. Dream has been typing away on his laptop, responding to emails and

doing his best not to be too disruptive as George naps beside him. The words take him by surprise; he was sure George was out cold just a moment ago.

“A story?” He asks, surprise evident. George nods, still looking mere moments away from sleep, eyelids drooping heavily.

“Mhm,” he confirms. “I’m bored. You need to entertain me.”

Dream huffs out a laugh. “I’m working. Why don’t you watch a movie or something?”

“Cause that would require me keeping my eyes open,” George explains, like that should’ve been obvious. “So stop working.”

“You’d like that wouldn’t you?” Dream asks.

“Uh-huh,” George confirms easily. “And that’s why you’re gonna do it.”

Dream scoffs, but shuts his laptop all the same. It’s not like the emails were particularly compelling anyway.

“You’re lucky you’re cute,” he mutters, and George grins, shuffling under the covers and getting more comfortable. He looks up at Dream expectantly, and Dream sighs, knowing what he wants. Despite how badly his desire for productivity itches at his brain (he’d already lost so much time to lounging around with George, even though Dream himself was feeling perfectly healthy), he finds himself crawling back under the covers beside George, turning to face him.

“Ok, I’m ready,” George prompts, stretching his leg out and prodding Dream’s shin with his toe. Dream rolls his eyes.

“I don’t know any stories,” he says.

“Sure you do,” George insists. “Everyone knows *some* stories. Like, fairytales or whatever.”

“I definitely don’t know any fairytales,” Dream snorts. “I know, like...some myths maybe.”

“Ok, then tell me one of those,” George says. Dream adjusts his posture, bringing an arm up behind his head. The fabric of his t-shirt rides up over his stomach a bit, like it’s too small, and he frowns, before the realization dawns on him that it’s *George’s* shirt he’s wearing. *What the hell?* When had that happened?

Now that he thinks of it, Dream realizes he had more or less been living in George’s room for the past few days. He’d even been showering in his bathroom, despite the fact that he had a perfectly good bathroom of his own down the hall. He must’ve picked up one of George’s shirts without thinking the last time he was getting changed, and not even noticed until just now. Maybe it should’ve felt odd to him, to be spending so much time in someone else’s space, but it didn’t. In fact, the idea of going back to his own room after George got better was starting to seem less and less appealing.

“Dream?” George prompts expectantly.

“Alright, uh, lemme think,” Dream says, wracking his brain for a moment. “Ok, do you know who Artemis is?”

“A goddess,” George says. Dream nods.

“Right, so this is a story about her, and this man that she fell in love with.”

“A love story,” George says teasingly. “You’re so sappy, Dream.”

“Shut up,” Dream mutters. “It’s not one of those kind of love stories.”

“Ok,” George says, settling further into his pillow and letting his eyes fall shut. “Go on, then.”

Dream smiles to himself, before continuing on.

“So, basically, Artemis was this goddess who never fell in love. She spent a lot of her time alone, or hunting, and she didn’t like people coming near her. Like, this one time, a hunter found her while she was bathing, and she turned him into a deer as punishment for seeing her naked.”

George snorts. “That’s funny.”

Dream grins, encouraged by his reaction.

“Yeah, and while other gods were always fucking around with mortals, or each other, Artemis just minded her own business, mostly. Until, ok, then this *other* hunter shows up, but he’s better than all the other hunters. Like, he can beat them all easily.”

George cracks an eye open, a smirk pulling at his lips. Dream looks away sharply. He can feel his face growing hot.

“Ok, stop-”

“No, Dream, please continue,” George urges. “Tell me all about this guy who thought he could beat all the hunters.”

“He *could*,” Dream insists with a laugh. “I - ok, shut up. Will you let me finish?”

George nods, closing his eyes again, but he’s still got a grin on his face.

“Alright, so this hunter, his name was Orion,” Dream continues. “And he also spent most of his time alone, just like Artemis. He was basically a hermit, living on Crete and not seeing anybody else. But, well, ok, do you know what Artemis’s job was?”

George shakes his head, the movement slow and sluggish. Clearly he was gonna drift off again soon. Dream feels a sudden urge to reach up and card his hand through his hair. His hand flexes by his side, frozen for a moment, before he gives into the impulse and moves some of George’s fringe off his forehead. George doesn’t open his eyes, but he does let out a gentle sigh, sounding content. Dream smiles softly, continuing the motion.

“She had to pull the moon across the sky on a chariot,” he explains. “And one night, she spots Orion, alone down there on that island, and she sees him hunting. Artemis had never fallen in love before, but she did with Orion. The problem was, he was a mortal. So, she just watches him for a while, not actually ever meeting him, until one night, she decides to go down. And she’s like, she’s a *goddess*, so obviously Orion falls in love with her too.”

“Obviously,” George echoes in a slow drawl.

“So, they fall in love, and everything is great for a while. Artemis would bring the moon over Crete, and then she’d stop to go down and see him, and they’d hunt together. Or, I don’t know, do other stuff too probably.”

"Other stuff?" George prompts innocently. Dream curls a lock of hair around his finger and tugs at it lightly in admonishment, which just makes George snicker.

"I'm never gonna finish if you keep interrupting me," Dream chides.

"Oh, well, obviously I want you to *finish*," George says, clearly trying to keep back laughter.

"You - you have the dirtiest mind in the *world*," Dream says with a groan.

"You just make it easy," George shrugs. "Now, come on. Continue."

Dream sighs. "Ok, so basically, things are awesome, they're both very happy, but then, the gods find out what Artemis is doing, and they all decide it needs to end."

George's expression changes slightly, and he opens his eyes, glancing up at Dream.

"The gods decide to send Apollo, Artemis's brother down, and he brings this big monster, a giant Scorpion, to kill Orion while he was sleeping."

George is sitting up a bit more now, properly listening. Dream's hand continues to brush gently through his hair, bringing it back away from his face.

"So, Orion wakes up, but it's too late. The scorpion is already there, and he tries to fight it, but he can't. So, he dies. And when Artemis discovers his body, she's so heartbroken she decides to place him and the monster in the sky, as constellations, but keeps them as far a part as possible. So, that's where the Orion constellations comes from. And the Scorpio one, too."

Dream finishes, proud of his own storytelling ability, but George is just staring at him, his mouth dropped open. Then, he brings a hand up and whacks Dream on the chest, hard.

"What the hell, Dream?" He demands. "That was a horrible story!"

Dream laughs, rubbing at his chest. "Ok, ow! But what do you want me to say? It's a myth, George."

"So?" George demands, flopping back down, looking obstinate. "That was an awful ending. He just dies, and Artemis is alone again?"

"Well, yeah," Dream says, shrugging. He settles down too, until he and George are at eye level, heads resting on the same pillow. George has still got a frown on his face, like he's genuinely upset at Dream for the unhappy ending. It's sort of adorable. "It's a very old story, George. You can't just change it."

George looks at him for a moment. Outside, the sun makes its meager last stand, the final rays of daylight settling over them as darkness takes a hold of the sky. The intimacy of their position hits Dream in full force then. They're only a few inches apart, and even in the dim light of the room, Dream can see every small detail of George's face, can practically count out his individual eyelashes. He almost considers doing it. It seems like a worthy task.

George's eyes scan his face, before coming to rest on Dream's mouth, like he can puzzle out the story just by looking at the place where it came from. Then, he meets Dream's gaze and stays there, eyes dark and searching.

"Why not?" He asks, his voice earnest. "Things change all the time."

Dream watches him in the shifting light, his lungs suddenly feeling leaden inside his chest. Every breath seems to be half-finished, as if waiting to be stolen. It's...a lot. Not too much. Just a lot. And Dream can't let himself wander down that path, can't allow himself to lose sense of the tenuous peace he's been able to maintain over the past few days. Not yet, at least. Not until George is well again.

So, he moves away, just slightly, and smiles.

"Maybe you can think of a better ending," he murmurs. George brings his lips together, then turns his head away, facing up towards the ceiling.

"Yeah," he says, voice quiet. "Maybe I can."

Not wanting to look like he's running away, Dream stays there for another minute or two, watching as George begins to settle in, his eyes growing heavy again. Then, he carefully extracts himself from the bed. He circles around to George's side - or, the side George is sleeping on, Dream corrects himself. It was all his bed, after all. Not like any side belonged to Dream.

He picks up the now empty glass on his bedside table, but before he can go to leave, George reaches out, catching his wrist between his fingers. Dream looks down, startled.

"I'm just gonna get you some more water," he says, suddenly feeling the need to whisper. George looks up at him, his expression torn. Dream doesn't try to move away, just stands there, wrist growing faintly damp in George's grasp.

"Thank you," George finally says. "For...taking care of me."

Dream stares down at him, amazed. His brain sets the words on loop in his head, an old recording played over again.

You do, Dream. You take really good care of me.

That conversation feels so far off it might as well have been a dream. But it wasn't. George *had* said that to him, and here he was, repeating the sentiment again, no longer hidden behind phone calls or separated by an ocean's worth of distance, but *here*, close enough for Dream to see the slight pinch to his brow, the hard set of his jaw. Close enough for Dream to touch.

"Of course," Dream murmurs. Then, he thinks of the space, not between them but between where they were and where they are now. All the time spent waiting, for the two of them to end up here. He takes a breath, feeling the weight of that reality settle around him like he's tugging on an old coat. "We take care of each other."

Neither of them say anything. Dream wonders how long the two of them could stay there, linked together by the press of George's fingers against his pulse. He remembers reading somewhere that you aren't supposed to feel someone's pulse with your thumb, or you'll just end up feeling your own heartbeat. He wonders which one George is feeling now; Dream's or his own. He wonders if it even matters.

Then, George does the unthinkable. Or, he does something Dream never thought he would've done until that exact moment. He cranes his neck forward, tilting Dream's hand in his grasp as he does, and presses his lips against Dream's knuckles. The brush is feather-light, there and gone in a second, but it sets Dream on fire all the same. George pulls away, letting Dream's wrist go and falling back into bed without another word. He curls over onto his side, away from Dream, looking like he's ready to go right to sleep. Dream's skin burns where his lips just were, some mix of

adrenaline and the unnatural heat George is still giving off.

Dream doesn't speak. He just takes the glass and walks out of the room, his brain buzzing. He feels like he might be able to say it now, finally make sense of all the thoughts swirling around in his brain and put them into words, but by the time he gets back upstairs George is already sound asleep. Dream keeps his footsteps quiet, setting the water back down, and slips into bed beside him. Words, he figures, can wait. At least for now.

When Dream wakes up the next morning, his mouth feels like it's been stuffed with cotton and the room around him is awash in a thin, milky light, peering in through the crack in George's curtain. The AC is still blasting on high, as it has been non-stop for the past few days, filling the air with a low, dull hum. Slowly, careful not to jostle George beside him, Dream stretches his arms over his head, letting out a small sigh when his shoulders give a satisfying *pop*.

Beside him, George stirs. Dream is about to apologize for waking him, but then George turns to meet his eyes, and Dream realizes all at once that the fever has broken. He doesn't even need to say anything; Dream can read it on his face.

"Hey," he murmurs in greeting.

"Hi," George replies, letting out a yawn. "I feel better."

Dream reaches out and presses the back of his hand flat against George's forehead. Sure enough, there's no more heat rising from his skin. He feels like himself again.

"Good," Dream says, pulling his hand back. "You want water?"

George shakes his head.

"Just wanna lie here," he says, and Dream lets out a small laugh.

"You aren't bored of that yet?" He asks. It wasn't like George had gotten to do much of anything lately, and Dream thought he'd surely be stir-crazy by now. But George just shrugs, sitting up further against the pillows.

"No," he says earnestly. "Are you?"

Dream actually considers the question for a moment. Normally, it was easy for him to succumb to restlessness. The idea that he could theoretically be wasting time often made him feel antsy, leaving him with the unsettling impression that he was missing something, like there was some deadline nipping at his heels that he'd suddenly realize he'd been neglecting. But right now, those anxieties don't seem as pressing. He feels content.

"No," he finally answers. "I like being here."

Maybe too much, his brain points out unhelpfully. The specter of his own empty room looms even larger in his head now that George was back to his normal self. There was no real need for Dream to stick around anymore. He tries not to let that thought eat away at him as he sits up more, leaning heavily against his elbow. George's hair is mused and his skin is flushed, looking healthier than he has in days. The sight is enough to make Dream smile, his own worries pushed aside for now.

George looks like he's about to speak, but when he inhales, a cough rattles through his frame, sending him bending forward. It doesn't sound as bad as it was before, but there's clearly still some

congestion in his chest.

“Here, uh, lie back,” Dream says, guiding George back down onto the pillows with a hand on his shoulder. George goes willingly, the coughing finally subsiding. “My mom got something for this, one sec.”

Dream gets out of bed, heading over to George’s desk where the medicine had been left in a pile and grabs a small jar of VapoRub. George eyes him as he comes to sit down next to him again.

“It helps with congestion,” Dream explains. “You’re supposed to rub it on your chest.”

“Hm,” George murmurs, looking at the jar curiously. Dream moves to pass it to him, but George doesn’t take it. Instead, he brings himself further out from the covers, and tugs his shirt off over his head. Dream stares at him, eyes wide, as George tosses the shirt down onto the ground beside them.

“Ok,” George sighs, collapsing back against the pillows. “Go ahead.”

About a million sirens go off in Dream’s brain all at once, every panic response in his body switched on, urging him to get the fuck out of there as fast as humanly possible. This was different. More than they’d ever done before. Far past casual touches, far past even sharing a bed. The type of thing that, if Dream followed through with, he wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to come back from.

But George didn’t know any of this. He was just asking Dream to help him, as Dream had already been doing. Tend to him. Take care of him.

Dream takes a steadying breath, doing his best to keep his hands from shaking as he unscrews the lid from the jar and gathers some ointment on his fingers. George isn’t looking at him, in fact, he seems to be staring into the middle distance rather purposefully. Maybe he was feeling awkward. Dream does his best to keep his expression neutral as he slowly lowers his hand down and begins rubbing it against George’s chest, just below his sternum.

“That feel ok?” Dream asks, embarrassed by how low his voice has suddenly become. George nods, his front teeth emerging to worry slightly at his lower lip. He still doesn’t meet Dream’s eye.

George’s skin is *soft*. Even as Dream does his best to keep his mind blank, he can’t help but notice this fact. Soft and warm from sleep, and Dream can quickly feel himself becoming addicted to the feeling of it underneath his fingertips. As if of its own volition, the circle his hand is making begins to widen, brushing further up towards George’s collarbone, then back down again, creating a vortex Dream can feel himself falling further and further into. George’s expression doesn’t change, but Dream can feel his breathing stutter under his hand, growing more shallow, like he’s putting a great deal of effort into keeping it steady.

Then, Dream’s hand wanders too far, and his finger accidentally brushes over George’s left nipple. George’s breath is sliced in half, caught suddenly in his throat, and his eyes close sharply, almost like he’s in pain. Dream’s hand freezes, and he’s about to pull back, when suddenly George speaks, his voice small and urgent.

“Keep going.”

Dream’s body acts while his brain still struggles to comprehend exactly what’s going on. Without a word, his hand continues its slow exploration, until it reaches the other side of George’s chest. His thumb repeats the motion, more purposefully this time, and brushes over George’s right nipple, pressing down with the smallest bit of force. He watches in awe as George’s lips part in a soft, fragile exhale. *Holy shit.*

Dream angles his body away slightly, trying to hide his own arousal, but then George shifts, the covers falling further down his body, and Dream realizes that he's already half-hard. *Jesus Christ*. Dream really needs to learn to think before he acts, but apparently now isn't the time, because his hand begins to wander lower down on George's body without any forethought, ghosting along the flat plane between his ribs, and further down still, resting lightly against George's stomach, just barely brushing against the soft trail of hair beneath his naval.

"Dream," George murmurs, breaking the silence between them again. His eyes remain closed. Dream's hand stills.

He could be good about this. He could turn away, walk out of the room if George wanted him to, scrub at his hands until he forgot the feeling of George's skin beneath his fingertips. He'd still know, though, in a part of him that couldn't be wiped clean. Now that he'd touched George like this, his brain had already been rewired around it. And though he wanted more, though he felt greedy for it in a way he'd never let himself acknowledge before, he also knew that *this*, everything they'd done so far, had been enough to change him for good. They didn't have to go any further. He was already lost to George completely.

Then, George shifts slightly, his neck arching up, breath leaving his lips in a short, desperate gasp.

"Please."

It's all Dream needs to hear. He's crowding closer to him now, unashamed of his eagerness, and bringing his hand down beneath the waist of George's sweatpants, wrapping it around his erection through the thin cotton of his boxers. George reaches down to tug his sweatpants lower, until they rest just above his knees and Dream can see everything exposed before him; the soft, pale skin of George's thighs, the obscene sight of Dream gripping him through his boxers, pre-cum already dampening the fabric. It's enough to make Dream dizzy.

"Can I-" he begins, his voice broken. "I wanna touch you George, please."

"Yes," George insists, reaching a hand up and tugging at Dream's shirt collar, bringing him closer. "I want it, Dream. I-"

Dream doesn't even let him finish, tugging his boxers down in one, smooth motion and taking him in his hand again. George gasps, throwing his head back, and if the sight before was enough to make Dream dizzy, this is enough to make him feel like he's in fucking free fall. He begins to stroke George slowly at first, watching in awe at the way his cock looks in his hand, smaller than Dream's but so pretty, already swollen and leaking in his grasp.

"Fuck," George sighs, the hand tangled in Dream's collar going slack.

It's down to instinct now. Dream presses his forehead against George's cheek, breath pooling in the hollow of his collarbone. Somehow, despite the fact that they've never done this before, he *knows* how to make George feel good. Even in the heat of the moment, he has to admit it's a bit of an ego boost, hearing the keening, breathless noises George makes at every twist of his wrist, every soft swipe of his thumb. Of course Dream wants to be good at this. Actually, scratch that, he wants to be the best at it. Wants to fucking perfect it, if he's given the chance.

George's hand comes up and grabs at Dream's hair, searching for some sort of anchor. His fingers tangle into the longer strands at the back of Dream's skull and when Dream increases his speed, just slightly, the fingers tense and *pull*. Dream lets out a sharp hiss through his teeth, but when George moves to pull his hand away, Dream tilts his head back, a silent plea for him to stay put. George evidently gets the memo, because his fingers resume their position almost immediately,

petting and tugging at Dream's hair with a desperate tenderness, as if he's frightened Dream is going to dissolve beneath his grasp. Dream keeps his breathing steady, his pace even, as if to say *I'm here, I'm not going anywhere.*

"God, Dream," George says, voice pleading. "I need - faster, now-"

Dream listens, increasing his speed, and George ruts up into his hand.

"Yes," he breathes. Overwhelmed, he tilts his face away, pressing his cheek into the pillow. Without thinking, Dream brings up his free hand and takes George's chin, tilting his face back towards him. George stares at him, eyes glassy and wide.

"Wanna look at you," Dream murmurs. "Wanna see you."

George nods, letting out a gasp when Dream moves his thumb over his slit, coaxing and gentle. Their foreheads are practically pressed together now, but Dream pulls his head back slightly, struck with the overwhelming impulse to not break eye contact, to keep George focused on him. Dream wants him to have it burned into his brain, to not be able to forget even for a moment that it was *Dream* making him feel this way.

Then, George opens his mouth, and takes Dream thumb under his tongue.

"*Shit,*" Dream swears, immediately overwhelmed by the sensation of George sucking on his skin.

"More," George gasps, and Dream brings his hand up from George's chin, removing his thumb and placing two fingers in his mouth instead. George seals his lips around them, and Dream moans, feeling the harsh scrape of George's teeth against the pads of his fingers, the hot, wet pull of his mouth, urging Dream's fingers deeper. There's a small bit of drool leaking out of the corner of his mouth, and it's so fucking hot it makes Dream wanna do something absurd, like lean forward and lick it away.

"Mhm," George mumbles around his fingers, and Dream feels the vibration of it shoot straight through him.

"That good?" He asks, and George nods. "Fuck, it feels good, George, you feel so fucking good."

George opens his mouth, Dream's fingers still resting there, just behind his teeth.

"Wanna make you feel good," he mumbles. He laps at Dream's fingers eagerly again, like he's drunk off the taste. Dream flexes his grip around George's cock, and George's hips rise to meet him, fucking into his hand. His lips part, voice coming muffled around Dream's fingers again. "*Fuck,* Dream, I'm close, I'm gonna-"

"I wanna see it, please, George, come on," Dream urges. There's a flash of something in George's eye, and it almost looks like he wants to be difficult, draw it out longer, but then Dream brings his thumb up over his slit again, and George is lost, thighs shuddering as Dream pumps him through his orgasm, fingers coated in George's cum as the rest shoots up onto his stomach, leaving him panting and breathless.

Dream thinks, half-delirious, *I wonder what that tastes like.* So, he raises his hand to his mouth and presses his thumb down against his tongue, tasting the saltiness there. George stares at him, lips flushed and parted, his eyes gone impossibly dark.

Dream's own erection is so insistent that he actually feels like it may kill him if he doesn't get off soon, so he moves to separate, slowly removing his fingers from George's open mouth. Sensing his

retreat, the hand on the back of Dream's head tightens, keeping him there.

"George," he protests hoarsely. "I need to--"

"Stay," George insists, his tone turning demanding. "I want to watch."

It's not even close the craziest thing Dream has done in the past couple of minutes, so he nods, sinking his hand into his boxers while George keeps his eyes trained on him, that intense eye contact never wavering. Dream's got on a pair of shorts, so it's not like George can see everything, but as soon as Dream starts touching himself, George is leaning forward and tugging at Dream's clothing, trying to get it off. Dream assists him, tugging down his own shorts and boxers and allowing his cock to spring up against his stomach. George sucks in a sharp breath at the sight, but doesn't say anything, just watches as Dream begins to stroke himself again.

It doesn't take him very long to feel that familiar pressure emerge inside of him, building with a brutal ferocity. Just the sight of George lying there in front of him, naked and still coming down off the high of his own orgasm, is enough to get Dream halfway there. Then, George reaches for him, swatting Dream's own hand away and taking over without missing a beat, and Dream curses, already knowing he isn't gonna last long. George's hand feels so different from his own, so different from what Dream had *imagined*. His fingers are swift and lithe, but his grip is insistent, stronger than Dream expected and so much better than anything his brain could've conjured up for him. Nothing compared to the real thing, to having George here, staring up at him like that, like Dream was about to give him some sort of gift, even though George was the one taking care of him now.

"Jesus, George," he murmurs, his voice raw. "I'm not gonna last like this."

"On me, please," George says plainly, with no trace of shame. "I want you to cum on me, Dream."

Dream gasps, head falling forward, and he's giving George exactly what he asked for, coming all over his stomach in swift, sudden bursts. George's hand stays there, stoking Dream through it. Dream's entire body feels oversensitive and alert, nothing like the strange, impersonal haze he had grown used to falling into after he came. George is there, watching him intently, and Dream immediately understands that he's never gonna want anything as badly as he wants to do this over and over again, as many times as George will let him. Even his sudden exhaustion can't keep that desire at bay. He's never gonna get tired of this. He's gonna want it forever.

They stay like that, breathing in the same air, as the cum on Dream's hand begins to cool. It should gross him out, maybe, but it doesn't. Nothing about this moment could repel him. It all still seems too good to be real.

"We should clean up," he murmurs, the only thing he can think to say, seeing the mess the two of them have made of each other.

"Sure," George agrees, but his voice sounds different now, no longer so sure of himself. Dream nods numbly, watching as George shifts to throw his legs over the side of the bed, taking his pants off fully and leaving them pooled on the ground at his feet. He walks over to the bathroom, pausing near the door. Dream stares at him, taking in the curve of his ass, his arched shoulders, how his skin looks in the light, glistening with sweat despite the coolness of the room. Then, George turns to look back at him, meeting his gaze.

"You coming?" He asks. The moment the question leaves his lips, his eyes suddenly dart away, settling on the floor as he waits for Dream's response. Slowly, Dream nods, and he's climbing out of bed too, shucking off his own clothes as he goes. George looks up at him again. Then, like water

after a long drought, a smile emerges on his face. Without another word, he turns on his heel and walks into the bathroom.

Dream waits for the rush of panic to greet him, but none arrives. A second later, he can hear the sound of the shower being turned on and the plastic curtain being opened. Not wanting to keep him waiting any longer, Dream heads in after George.

Scrambled Eggs

After they showered, Dream had excused himself to go back to his room and put on some clothes that were actually his own. At least, that had been his intention. Now, he's just sort of standing in front of his mirror, staring at himself and trying to make sense of what the fuck happened in the past hour or so. So far he isn't making very good progress.

He tries to approach it analytically, but Dream knows deep down, as much as he wants to see himself as a person guided by rationality, he's always been guided by his heart. It frustrates the hell out of him, honestly, because time and time again he's found himself wishing he could bring up walls around himself, not feel so affected by the shit going on around him. At his worst, he remembers wishing he couldn't feel anything at all. That he could read all the horrible things people were saying about him and let it roll right off. But then again, he knew that it wasn't rationality he'd been craving, not really. It was numbness.

Luckily, he's mostly moved past that now. He doesn't find himself longing to feel *nothing* anymore, but sometimes, like right now, he just wishes he felt stuff *less*. The good and the bad.

Sadness he was used to. He knew that, when it hit him, it'd hit him harder than it should, and while it was certainly unpleasant, Dream had learned to cope. He was less alone now, which made it that much easier. What he wasn't used to, however, was *this*. This high, fluttery feeling in his chest, heart set on high alert, almost like his body is in fight or flight mode, like he's being hunted. He lets out a laugh at the thought. It did sort of feel like playing Manhunt; the elation, the anxiety, the way his whole world had narrowed to one, singular focus. He presses his hands over his eyes, mentally chiding himself. Normal people didn't have thoughts like this after hooking up with someone. Then again, nothing about this situation was normal. It felt dumb to even pretend that it was.

Slowly, Dream lowers his hands, giving his reflection a once-over. He's half-expecting there to be some sort of huge outward difference in his appearance, as if touching George would've somehow marked him for life. Dream thinks about how it felt and figures that maybe that isn't such a crazy thought. He *did* feel marked by him. He wonders if George feels the same. If he can still feel the lingering impression of Dream's touch, like Dream can still feel the ghost of George's fingers tangled in his hair, or his breath against his ear, or his hand wrapped around -

Dream smacks the sides of his face firmly, snapping himself out of it. This was getting him nowhere.

His hair, still damp from the shower, drips down onto his t-shirt, darkening the fabric. Even *that* is enough to send Dream's mind spiraling again. They had just *showered* together, which should've felt huge, or weird, but it didn't. It felt natural, like any other activity they'd done together, no more strange than sitting down on the couch to watch a movie. In fact, it had been sort of *fun*. Dream didn't think it was supposed to be like that. They were supposed to be avoiding each other's gaze, feeling awkward in the wake of what they'd just done, or else doing the opposite, staring at each other headily and feeling only tension between them, all of their previous friendliness wiped away.

Instead, George's fringe kept on falling in his face, so Dream had pushed it back from his forehead, until it stuck up at weird angles, which made them both laugh. George then became insistent on this theory that Dream had been hiding some secret tattoo from him the whole time, and went to work scanning his body for it, but when Dream tried to swat his hand away, George stumbled and Dream had to catch him by the shoulders, and they were laughing again, doing their best to not go crashing to the ground together.

"I need a bigger shower," George said, bracing one hand against the wall.

"You expecting to have another person in here that much?" Dream asked, a grin playing at his lips. George merely shrugged, eyes shining up at him. The water was running very hot (on Dream's insistence) so steam was billowing up around them, making everything look hazy and turning George's cheeks a bright, beautiful pink.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess that remains to be seen."

It wasn't a direct invitation, but it might as well have been. Dream was still unsure of how far to push, of what exactly he was allowed to ask for, but it was clear that George *wanted* this. Wanted some version of it, at least.

So why the hell was Dream still up here, agonizing over everything? Why didn't he trust it, trust that George wouldn't change his mind, that Dream wouldn't walk downstairs and see him closed off again, face impassive, suddenly entirely unreceptive to Dream or, God forbid, even repulsed? The thought sends a sharp jolt of fear through him. Dream feels like a kid again, inventing monsters under his bed out of thin air. There was nothing to be scared of, he knew this, and yet that didn't stop the shadows from looking like claws. There was no reason for him to be doubting himself, to be doubting *George*, and yet it was impossible for him to ignore the encroaching sense of dread.

Dream takes a steadying breath. Staying up here wasn't going to solve anything, that much was obvious. He tugs on the hem of his t-shirt, trying to flatten out some of the worst wrinkles. It's a rare piece of clothing in his closet that isn't OU apparel, merch or a gift from a fan. He'd bought it with George and Sapnap, during a trip out to the beach not that long ago. In big letters, across the front, it reads FLORIDA SWEATER. It had amused George to no end, so obviously Dream had to get it, just to see the way his face lit up when Dream walked out of the store wearing it. He lets out a laugh, torn between amusement and frustration. Maybe that's why it felt so scary. George had seeped his way into every part of Dream's life; into his home, his career, his wardrobe, his day to day existence. It felt like he was *inside* of him, like Dream could no more separate George from himself than he could remove his own organs. It would wound him. He'd be maimed.

There was no way for the two of them to untangle themselves from each other. Which meant there was no going back from this. They could only go forward. Into what, Dream still wasn't quite sure.

He recalls the way George had looked at him that night when the fever first hit. How Dream had held his face in his hands, how he'd finally managed to get the right words out, after all that time spent trapped in his own head.

Just tell me what you need.

Dream figures that if he said it once, surely he'd be able to do it again. The stakes felt higher this time but the basic principle remained the same.

Whatever George wanted, whatever he *needed* from him, Dream would give. He always had. Why should this time be any different?

With that thought in mind, Dream finally emerges from his room. George had mentioned something about food after their shower, so Dream isn't surprised to hear muffled sounds coming from two floors down.

When he reaches the kitchen, he spots George in front of the stove, staring down at a pan set in front of him.

“Hi,” Dream greets. George turns to look at him, startled.

“Hey,” he breathes. His hair is curled slightly, still damp after the shower, and he’s changed into a simple t-shirt and sweats. Dream wants to tug him back upstairs and into bed literally immediately but he figures maybe they should actually have a conversation first before going down that road again. Or at least eat something.

“What are you making?” Dream asks, coming closer to inspect whatever’s in the pan.

“Scrambled eggs,” George mutters, turning his attention back to the stove. “But they’re not cooperating.”

Dream huffs out a laugh, gently bumping George’s hip with his own, urging him to move over. George does, but not much, so they still have to remain pressed up against each other for Dream to get a good look at the eggs.

“Oh ok, the heat’s on too high,” he says. “These are gonna be dry.”

“Ugh,” George groans. “I thought eggs were supposed to be easy to make.”

“They are,” Dream reassures him. “Here, uh, you toss these. I’ll grab more eggs, we’ll start again.”

George nods, picking up the pan and bringing it over to the trashcan. Dream heads to the fridge but ends up stopping short right in front of it.

There are three magnets set in a line, exactly at his eye-level, spelling out D N F in colorful, blocky letters. That was new. Dream turns around to find George already looking at him, pan hovering over the trashcan.

“When did you do that?” He asks.

“Don’t worry,” George says, a small smile on his face. “It was before we got each other off.”

Dream lets out a surprised laugh, completely caught off guard by George’s bluntness. George blooms at the sight, his smile widening and his eyes crinkling up. He heads back over the stove, setting the now empty pan back down on the burner. Dream stares at his back for a moment, a grin on his face, before he finally remembers the task at hand. He opens the fridge, grabs the carton of eggs and some butter, and heads back to the stove to stand beside George, making a conscious effort to keep their bodies close.

“Ok, here,” he says, grabbing the bowl George had clearly used earlier that was still out on the counter beside him. There’s a fork resting in it as well, and Dream picks it up, handing it to George to hold in the meantime. George accepts it, watching him intently. He’s tempted to try and pull off some impressive move, like crack the eggs with one hand, but Dream figures it’s better to play it safe right now and not do anything that could result in them having to pick out shells. So, he grabs the first egg and (carefully) cracks it over the bowl, setting the shell down next to it before adding another, then another, until there are four eggs swimming together. Then, he takes the fork back from George, who relinquishes it willingly, seemingly content to let Dream take over. Dream begins whisking the eggs together, until they start to take on a light yellow color, becoming more cohesive.

Once he’s happy with how the mixture looks, he sets the bowl down and turns the knob on the stove, lowering the heat beneath the pan. Beside him, George lofts himself up onto the counter, looking pleased. Dream drops a slab of butter in the pan to start melting and glances over at him.

“Was this just a ploy to get me to make breakfast for you?” He asks. George smirks.

“Perhaps,” he says, shrugging.

“You could’ve just asked,” Dream says, nudging George’s leg lightly with his elbow. George looks over at him, eyes softening.

“Yeah,” he murmurs. “I suppose I could’ve.”

Dream opens his mouth, but for some reason, the words he had carefully prepared in his head don’t feel quite adequate anymore, so he shuts it again. George turns his focus away, staring down at his feet, and when Dream follows his gaze, he realizes George is wearing the fuzzy socks his mom had bought for him. Dream grins, eyes darting back up.

“Nice socks,” he remarks. George rolls his eyes, but even with his head down, Dream can still tell he’s smiling.

“You’re just jealous she didn’t get you a pair,” he says. Dream opens his mouth, painting on an expression of faux-outrage.

“How dare you?” He demands, which prompts George to look up at him, laughter already playing behind his eyes. “If you’re implying my mom loves you more than me-”

“I don’t know Dream, you mom *really* likes me,” George says teasingly. “She called me - what did she call me?”

Dream snorts, immediately recalling the moment George was referring to. It’d happened during their first meeting. George had been *so* nervous, it was honestly pretty adorable to witness. He must’ve thanked her for the food she brought over at least five times.

“A perfect gentleman,” Dream says. George beams at him.

“Exactly,” he says. “And I am!”

“Oh, please,” Dream laughs. “She doesn’t know the real you, alright? You were just sucking up.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” George insists. “Besides, you love that your mom loves me.”

Dream flushes. Of course George was right. How could he not? Those were two of his favorite people in the whole world, obviously he loved that they got along so well. But there was no way Dream could say that out loud. Somehow it felt...heavier, after everything, to articulate how much George mattered to him now. Though, he supposes, it wasn’t exactly the type of thing he needed to voice out loud. Every part of him practically screamed it. Sometimes, his life felt like one long declaration of his devotion to George. Dream winces internally, realizing how intense that sounds. Probably best he keep that to himself.

George grins in victory, seeming to take Dream’s expression as confirmation. He leans forward, peering down into the pan, and Dream realizes with a start that he still needs to pour the eggs in. He does, and then grabs a spatula, beginning to push the eggs around in smooth, even circles. A silence settles around them. The house feels absolutely huge, almost cavernous, every small noise echoing off into the empty space. Dream had never noticed how high the ceilings were, how big every room felt, until right then. It makes him feel so small in comparison.

“So,” George begins, and even before he says anything else, Dream can tell they’re going to talk

about it now. His stomach swoops, like he's just driven too fast down a steep hill. *Shit*. He needs to relax.

"Yeah?" He prompts, his voice coming out higher than he would've liked. He'd been going for cool and casual, not startled prey animal. George, however, doesn't seem to notice. He just clears his throat, eyes still trained on the eggs.

"You..." He cuts himself off, pinching his mouth shut. Dream can tell how difficult this is for him, and immediately he wants to take away that burden, even as his own doubts gnaw viciously at his insides. He turns to look at George, the eggs all but forgotten in front of him. George clearly notes the change, but it still takes a moment for him to actually look Dream in the eyes.

"What is it, George?" Dream asks, keeping his voice low, calm despite the nerves buzzing beneath his skin. George searches his face with such intensity, Dream wonders if he might be seriously trying to communicate with him telepathically. It doesn't seem that odd for the two of them. Dream half-expects it to work.

"You wanted that, right?" George finally asks. His expression is still drawn, and as soon as the words leave his lips, something stony settles in his gaze, like he's bracing himself.

Dream resists the urge to gape at him, worried that it might give the wrong impression. It *was* shocking, though. Dream's desire felt so obvious to him. If anything, he was worried he'd come on a bit too strong.

"Yes," he breathes, words trailing off into a short, disbelieving laugh. "Yes, George. I wanted that. I've..."

He pauses, unsure of how much information to lay out on the table right now.

"I've wanted it for a while, actually," he finishes, refusing to let his doubts get the best of him. Forward. They had to go forward.

George's eyebrows climb towards his hairline. He seems genuinely surprised, but there's still some hesitancy there, like he isn't willing to let his guard down completely.

"For how long?" He asks quietly.

"At least two weeks," Dream admits. "Longer, probably, if I'm being honest."

George's eyes go wide and he looks away hastily, clearing his throat as he does. His body seems stiffer now, coiled up, like he wants the option to make a quick escape if needed. Without thinking, Dream reaches forward and places a hand on his knee. George looks back up at him.

"Right," he says, offering a tight smile. "Two weeks is a long time."

Dream lets out a sigh, relieved that George isn't about to bolt out of the room. With every passing moment, his own reservations feel less and less important. Everything paled in comparison to how badly he wanted to keep George here, with him.

"I thought about it all the time," he says. George's smile turns more genuine at his words and Dream grins in response. "It drove me crazy. Sometimes it was hard to get anything done."

George's lips twitch.

"How ever did you survive?" He asks. Dream shrugs.

“Jacking off, mostly.”

George lets out a surprised laugh, bringing a hand up in an attempt to hide his smile. Encouraged by his reaction, Dream steps closer into his space, slotting himself between George’s legs. Slowly, George lowers his hand and looks down at Dream, his face illuminated by the sunlight streaming in through the big window above the sink. It feels like an optical illusion, because it looks like the light is coming from *inside* of him, like he’s glowing with it.

“You just couldn’t control yourself, could you?” George asks, clearly enjoying this. Dream shakes his head.

“Fuck no,” he says. “I mean, Jesus, George. Look at you.”

George blinks at him, lips pressed together.

“What do you mean?” He asks.

“I mean...” Dream trails off, confusion evident. “George, come on.”

“What?” George demands, reaching a hand up and pressing it firmly against Dream’s chest, a physical manifestation of his insistence. “I’m serious, what?”

“George, even before I knew I wanted to have sex with you I knew you were, like, the most gorgeous thing in the universe,” Dream says earnestly. George’s eyes go huge, and the weight of what he just said hits Dream fully then. God, he really needed to work on his brain to mouth filter. “I mean...I just mean, you’re-”

“I thought about it too,” George says suddenly, his grip growing tighter, bunching up the fabric of Dream’s shirt. “And I-”

He stops himself, a wary expression settling over his face.

“What, George?” Dream prompts, resting his hands firmly over George’s thighs. George lets out a breath, his eyes darkening.

“I dreamed about it,” he confesses. “It’s like...it’s like you were in my head all the time. I don’t know.”

George’s eyes dart away then, and Dream trails his hands up further, thumbs pressing firmly into the soft flesh just below his hipbones. George gasps, his gaze flitting back to Dream.

“You said my name,” Dream murmurs, testing. “When you were sleeping. I heard it.”

For a brief moment, George looks genuinely mortified, but just as quick, the expression passes and he’s fixing Dream with a look like somehow he’d planned it, like it was all some elaborate set-up he’d mastered into existence. He cocks an eyebrow, challenging. For some reason, it makes Dream’s heart feel incredibly soft.

“That *really* made me crazy,” Dream continues, offering a small smile. “Honestly, I sort of spiraled.”

George’s lips part, and then he’s returning Dream’s smile, any trace of defensiveness wiped from his expression.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” George asks, sounding amazed, like he can’t quite believe what he’s hearing. Dream shrugs, bringing his hands up further, making George squirm. He grins,

sharper this time.

“I didn’t know if you wanted me like that,” Dream admits, hands coming to rest on George’s hips, pulling him towards the edge of the counter. George exhales sharply, his other hand coming up to grab onto Dream’s bicep.

“I do,” he says breathlessly. He swallows, and Dream tracks the motion of his Adam’s apple. His next words seem to come with a great deal of effort, as if there’s more behind them, weighing them down. “I do, Dream. I want you.”

“Say it again,” Dream says, leaning in closer, speaking right into the shell of George’s ear. George scoffs.

“Greedy,” he mutters, the hand on Dream’s arm tensing as he speaks. Dream brings his mouth down, sucking at the tender spot beneath George’s ear, intent on leaving a mark. George bucks up against him with a stuttered sigh, pressing their bodies flush against each other.

“For you?” Dream asks, breath ghosting against George’s skin. “Always.”

He pulls back then, just slightly, and is met with George staring at him, a blotchy stain of red rising on his cheeks. Dream feels like he might vibrate straight out of his skin, watching the way George’s eyes rake across his face.

Then, from beside them, a waft of smoke comes from the stove.

“Oh, fuck,” Dream swears, breaking them apart suddenly and rushing over the stove. He pulls the pan away and turns off the burner. The eggs are already a smoldering mess, far past saving. He sighs, bringing the pan over to the sink and setting it down.

“Dream,” George says, his voice quiet. Dream turns back to him, seeing the soft smile on George’s face. He lets out a breath. It all feels so certain then. Like Dream knows what he’s about to say, even before he says it.

“Yeah?” He asks, suddenly feeling nervous. George angles his head, beckoning Dream back to him. Without a word, Dream comes to stand in front of him, and George silently part his legs, welcoming him back in. He seems almost patient now. Kind, in the face of Dream’s sudden apprehension.

“Do you want to kiss me?”

Light crests over the tree line outside, turning the room impossibly golden. Dream has never been more aware of his own body, of the way his breath moves, quick and shallow past his lips, of the way his heart sounds in his ears, so loud it may as well be reverberating through the bones of the house. His eyes search George’s face, focus on the curve of his cupid’s bow, the rosy flush on his cheeks, the soft shadow of stubble across his jaw.

George was *beautiful*, and he was Dream’s best friend, and at that moment, more than anything else in the world, Dream wanted to kiss him. It was as simple as that. Maybe it always had been.

“Yes,” Dream breathes, titling his face, until their lips are less than an inch apart. Teasingly, because he can, George moves back, just slightly, a small grin on his face.

“Ok,” he says, and then he gives Dream everything. “Then kiss me.”

Dream nods, slowly taking George’s face in his hands, appreciating the way his breathing stalls,

only for a second. Everything seems to go still around them. Then, Dream closes the gap between them and finally kisses George.

The moment their lips touch, Dream feels something click into place inside of him, a window being thrown open, a lock giving way. George wraps his arms around Dream's neck, titling his head as he does, so their lips slot together, one kiss turning into another, then another. Dream opens his mouth and George licks into him eagerly, hungrily, and Dream actually hears a *growl* emerge from his own throat, some new part of himself taking over as he presses up against George, feeling the hot presence of his growing arousal against his stomach. George gasps, and Dream uses the opportunity to kiss him deeper, nipping lightly at George's lower lip before bringing his tongue inside his mouth, devouring him. George is so open beneath him, but insistent too, demanding as he hooks his legs around Dream's hips, urging him impossibly closer.

The hands on George's jaw turn possessive as Dream feels himself craving more, more friction, more access, and George responds by tangling his fingers in Dream's hair, pulling at the long strands. Dream gasps, breaking them apart for a moment.

George actually *whines* at the loss of contact and fuck if that doesn't make Dream's head swim.

"You're so fucking hot," Dream murmurs against his lips, feeling entirely incoherent. "God, George."

"Kiss me," he says again, and Dream laughs.

"Now who's being greedy?" He asks. George doesn't even try to humor him, simply tugs Dream back in, kissing impatiently at his lips until Dream opens his mouth and brings their tongues together again. The sensation sends a wave of electricity up Dream's spine, those nerves under his skin turning into currents, making his limbs feel buzzy and tight.

"Jesus," Dream says as he pulls back, his breathing coming short and unsteady. He pulls his hands away from George's face, unsurprised to find them trembling. "I'm shaking."

And he is, properly too, as if he's freezing. George makes a sound in the back of his throat like something is caught there. Then, he ducks his head down, kissing along Dream's jaw.

"Shh, It's ok," he soothes, so sweet it makes Dream's knees feel weak. "Just..touch me, alright? I need you to touch me."

Dream doesn't respond, just brings George's face up and kisses him again, so intensely he feels his lips start to sting. Finally, he begins snaking his hands up under George's shirt, along his ribs. George moans as Dream's hands come to rest around his waist, engulfing him there.

"Fuck, Dream," he sighs, arching up against him. Dream's head descends down to the exposed part of George's neck, scrapping his teeth against his pulse, making George shudder in his hands.

"Come on, baby," Dream urges, the pet-name slipping out naturally. George whines again, throwing his head back further, hair falling over his eyes. "Tell me what else you need."

"I - God, Dream," George says, his voice raw and shaky. A coiling heat spreads inside of Dream and he brings a hand up, tilting George's chin down so he can meet his gaze. George stares at him, looking completely wrecked, and Dream crashes their lips together again. George's hand grabs onto his shoulder, fingers pressing down with a bruising intensity. Dream rocks up into him, aching hard.

George pulls away again, and Dream immediately follows, trying to chase after his lips, but George

stops him, the hand in his hair tugging his head back, making Dream groan.

“I need you to fuck me,” George says, his voice low and measured despite how overwrought he looks, lips swollen and slick with spit. “Now, Dream.”

“*Shit*,” Dream exhales, knocking his forehead against George’s collarbone, suddenly too overwhelmed to look him in the eye. George tugs at his hair again and Dream bucks up against him involuntarily, eliciting another moan from George’s lips.

Dream raises his head and kisses George again, slower this time, moving their mouths together languidly. George’s touch turns tender, almost reverent, the hand on Dream’s shoulder snaking up to cup at his cheek. They stay like that for a while, kissing until Dream’s mouth aches, until he can’t help but laugh against George’s lips, joy spilling out of him, making his face feel warm.

“What is it?” George asks, pulling away. Dream smiles, presses another kiss to his lips, just because he can.

“I’m just really happy,” he says honestly. George rolls his eyes.

“You are such an idiot,” he says, unable to mask the fondness in his voice. Dream beams at him, then leans in, kissing his nose, his cheeks, his freckles, until George is laughing too, batting at his chest in protest. “Oh my God, Dream!”

“What?” Dream laughs, and tugs him in for another kiss, a proper one this time. George melts against him, his whole body sagging against Dream’s chest. Dream moves their lips together, until they’re both panting again, and this time, when they separate, George looks completely dazed. Dream brings his hands down to the slope of George’s ass, squeezes.

“Wanna give you everything,” he says hoarsely. “Whatever you want.”

George nods and edges even further off the counter, rubbing himself against Dream filthily, making Dream see stars.

“Yeah?” George prompts, goading. He scrapes his teeth along the curve of Dream’s jaw, biting down at the soft flesh just above his throat.

“Anything, baby,” Dream reassures. He brings his hands back up under George’s shirt, rubbing firm circles against his chest, just as he’d done that morning, thumbing at George’s nipples until George is whining and squirming underneath his hands.

“I want to be inside you, or you can be inside me. We should be inside each other,” George says hurriedly. Dream laughs and places a kiss firmly against George’s forehead.

“I think we’ll have to choose one for now, ok?”

“Not necessarily,” George reasons. “You can fuck me and I can eat you.”

Dream chokes. “Jesus, George, you aren’t supposed to say things like that.”

George frowns.

“But it’s what I want,” he says plainly. Honestly, Dream can’t argue with that. It’s what he wants too, and he figures they’ve done quite enough talking about it, and it’s time to actually start *doing* something other than just rubbing up against each other on the kitchen counter. He starts to pull back, intent on getting them somewhere more comfortable, but before he can get far, George grabs

the front of his shirt, tugging him back. Dream stares down at him.

“What are you-?” He begins, unsure of why George refuses to let him go. George looks up at him, lashes fluttering and Dream actually does gape at him now, his mouth dropping open of its own accord as he realizes exactly what’s going through George’s head. “George, we are not having sex in the kitchen.”

“Why not?” George asks, sounding genuinely perplexed. Dream shakes his head, a laugh bubbling out of his chest.

“You are such a menace,” he says. When George doesn’t react, he straightens up further. “Come on, seriously.”

“No, I want you to fuck me here,” George insists, with the same level of authority he’ll use to demand Dream stay up with him on Discord for another hour, or edit faster so they can hang out more. Dream grins at the familiarity of his tone.

“We *eat* here, George,” he says pointedly. “Besides, Nick could walk in-”

“I don’t care,” George interrupts. Dream stares at him, realizing with a shock that George is dead serious.

“You actually don’t care?” He asks. George shakes his head. “You’re...”

Dream trails off, searching for the right words. When none come, he kisses George again, brief, amused. Then, he brings his arms down lower, wraps them firmly around George’s waist, and *lifts*.

“Dream!” George exclaims, legs instinctively tightening around Dream’s waist, arms coming to clamp down around his shoulders.

“We can discuss this later, alright?” Dream says, looking up at him. “But we are not having our first time in the same place where we make breakfast.”

“Dream, I swear, put me down,” George demands, still clinging to his front. “You’re gonna drop me.”

“Not a chance,” Dream says, planting a firm kiss to the side of his head in reassurance. “Let me take you up to bed. Please?”

George watches him for a moment, looking like there’s a protest still sitting on the tip of his tongue. Finally, he nods, seeming to trust Dream, at least for now.

“Ok,” he mutters. Dream smiles, adjusting his arms so they’re placed firmly underneath his ass, cradling him there.

“Another time,” Dream assures. “I promise.”

Something in George’s eyes sparks at the words.

“So if I wanted to fuck you on this counter right here,” George murmurs. “You’d let me?”

Dream nods numbly, the coil of desire inside of him tightening. George smiles, and brings a hand up, fingernails scratching lightly at the back of Dream’s neck.

“Alright then,” he says, leaning in close so his breath ghosts along Dream’s lips, the heat of it making Dream dizzy. “Now, are you gonna keep standing here like an absolute *nimrod*, or are you

gonna take me upstairs and fuck me?”

“Upstairs,” Dream says without hesitation, not even trying to mask his eagerness. “Upstairs, definitely.”

George fixes him with a bright smile, and he brings his head back down, resting his chin against Dream’s shoulder. George is easy to carry, even in this position, and Dream gets them all the way up to the second floor before George decides to mess with him, planting a kiss just above the collar of Dream’s shirt, then another up further, near his Adam’s apple. Dream stops on the stairs, one hand reaching out for the bannister to steady himself.

“Ok, now I actually am gonna drop you,” he huffs. George shrugs, and tilts his head again, licking a stripe up Dream’s neck, all the way to his jaw.

“You taste good,” George says, clearly testing him. Defiantly, Dream props him up higher, prompting George to look at him, arms resting loosely around his neck.

“You’re evil,” Dream chides. George just smiles at him, the very picture of innocence.

“I have no idea what you mean,” he says. Dream shakes his head, then does loosen his grasp, just for a moment, just enough to get George clinging to him again, hands gripping the front of his t-shirt. He grins.

“Gotcha.”

George glares at him, but Dream softens the moment by nudging their noses together and kissing George slowly, like he has all the time in the world, despite the fact that they’re standing in the middle of the staircase. The hands against Dream’s chest go slack, then snake back up around his neck, up into his hair. When they pull apart, Dream feels his legs waver.

“Easy there,” George cautions. “You still got me?”

Dream nods. “Of course.”

George smiles all slow, and Dream isn’t sure what’s making him more breathless, the weight of George’s body in his arms or the weight of his gaze on his face. Dream thought he was used to it by now, the way George was always staring at him, always watching, but this doesn’t feel like any of the other times. It doesn’t look like he’s being studied, it looks like he’s being...appreciated. Admired.

Dream’s never seen George look at *anyone* like that before. Maybe he never has.

“Well, go on,” George says, smirking. “Chop chop.”

Dream pinches his side but continues his trek upstairs all the same. By the time they reach Dream’s room, the energy beneath his skin has built up to the point where he practically throws George down onto the mattress, making it bounce. George lets out a laugh, but Dream is already climbing over him, pressing their lips together and stealing the laugh right out of his mouth.

“God, you’re so eager,” George says, sounding like he loves it. Dream brings his elbows up on either side of his face, caging him in. “Like a puppy.”

Dream scrunches up his nose. “Shut up.”

George just laughs, tugging him back down again. They don’t stay like that for long - in a moment,

George is shoving at his shoulder, pushing Dream over onto his back and climbing on top of him, straddling his hips. Dream shifts up onto his elbows, and realizes that George is looking at him like that again, just like he had on the stairs.

“What?” Dream asks, feeling like he must look a bit ridiculous, with his hair all messed up, in his dumb t-shirt. George opens his mouth but doesn’t speak. Slowly, he brings a hand up, cupping Dream’s cheek. Dream shifts his head, turning to the side and pressing a kiss into George’s palm.

“You look...” George trails off. Dream sits up further, hands ghosting underneath the hem of George’s t-shirt, pushing it up so a sliver of his stomach is exposed. George shivers as the cool air of the AC hits his skin.

“I look...” Dream prompts. Then, a thought dawns on him. Maybe it’s the location. He was on his bed when it happened, after all. He grins at the memory of George’s voice in his ear, all those weeks ago. His hands turn more pressing, thumbs biting into the sloping valley between George’s hipbones. “Pretty?”

George does his best to suppress his smile, but Dream sees it all the same. With some reluctance, he nods.

“Do you like that?” George asks. He strokes his thumb up Dream’s cheekbone, then back down, along the ridge of his bottom lip. “When I call you pretty?”

Dream nods. “Course I do.”

He catches George’s wrist in his hand and presses his lips against the skin, then down lower, along his arm. George watches him with heavily lidded eyes, his breath growing short again.

“And I think,” Dream says, continuing the trail of kisses up past George’s elbow, pushing up the sleeve of his shirt so he has access to his shoulder. “You like it too.”

“No I don’t,” George shoots back automatically. Dream scoffs, and begins tugging at the hem of George’s shirt. Wordlessly, George raises his arms, allowing Dream to pull the shirt off over his head. Dream tosses it aside, hands returning to capture George’s waist, bracketing him in. George trembles at the touch, goosebumps sprouting up along his skin.

“Come on now,” Dream chastises, thumbs making small circles into the flesh under George’s ribs. George presses himself further against Dream, settling into his lap, and Dream feels the hot weight of his arousal against him. Experimentally, he brings his hips up, rubbing their erections together. George moans at the friction, his head falling forward.

“That feel good?” Dream asks, perhaps a bit redundantly. George raises his head to shoot him a glare, but then Dream repeats the motion, and George’s composure is lost, eyes sliding shut at the contact.

“Yes,” he gasps, blindly grabbing for Dream’s shirt. They develop a rhythm together; George grinding down onto his lap and Dream rising up to meet him. It’s so fucking intense, Dream could easily come undone from this alone.

“Can you - *fuck* -” Dream chokes, the friction between them almost too much to bear. “Can you lie down for me?”

George nods, and rolls off of him. Dream takes advantage of the brief loss of contact to remove his own shirt. Then, he stands up from the bed, tugging down his pants. His erection is aching, but he keeps his boxers on for now, not wanting to rush anything. He turns back to the bed to find George

has finished undressing as well, and is lying there touching himself lazily through his boxers, hand stroking over the outline of his dick.

“Fuck,” Dream breathes. “You’re so beautiful.”

George’s eyes go wide. He reaches a hand out, grabbing at Dream’s wrist and tugging him back down. Dream goes easily, slotting his lower body between George’s open legs.

“I’m so lucky,” Dream murmurs. “So fucking lucky.”

“God, Dream,” George sighs, and kisses Dream again, his tongue delving further into Dream’s mouth, exploring him. Dream reaches down and places his hand over George’s, following the stroking motion. George lets out a choked noise, and removes his hand entirely, letting Dream take over. Their lips part, and Dream pulls back, his hand dipping below the seam of George’s boxers, brushing past the coarse, dark patch of hair. Not allowing them to separate any further, George begins tugging his boxers off, getting them down to his knees before Dream finishes the job for him, adjusting his position so he can pull them all the way down George’s legs. The moment they’re discarded, Dream climbs back up his body, coming to rest his cheek against George’s thigh, gazing up at him. George tangles a hand in his hair, fingers scratching hypnotically at Dream’s skull.

“You have a pretty dick,” Dream says. George laughs.

“I do?” He asks, sounding delighted.

“Yes.” Dream nods. “Wanna know what it tastes like.”

George’s mouth parts and he lets out a whine, pressing a hand over his face.

“Fuck, Dream.”

Dream grins, nuzzling his face into the skin of George’s thigh, drinking in scent of sweat and lavender body wash still lingering there. He raises his head, mouth hovering expectantly over George’s cock, which is already leaking pre-cum at the tip. When he parts his lips and lets out a hot breath over the head, George’s hips buck up.

“So eager,” Dream echoes, and places a hand firmly against the sharp fin of George’s hipbone, keeping him still. George lets out a whimper as Dream brings his mouth down, pressing a kiss against the tip before taking George in his mouth.

“Holy shit, Dream,” George sobs. Dream hums, lips stretching around the head as he brings his mouth lower, trying to adjust his throat to the new, unfamiliar weight. He knew he *wanted* to know what George tasted like, but fuck, he didn’t expect to like it so much. It’s fucking addicting, not because it’s a particularly pleasant taste, but because it’s *George*. And Dream wants it, wants every part of him, as much as George will give him.

The whole thing is kind of sloppy, and Dream can feel some drool begin to leak out of the corner of his mouth, but George is looking at him with *awe*, like Dream is performing some sort of magic trick. Dream tries to get a better rhythm going, bobbing his head down and then licking his way back up to the tip. George’s sounds grow more desperate; sharp, high cries that leave Dream aching. When he pulls his lips away, there’s a string of spit shining between his tongue and the tip of George’s cock. George looks like he actually might cry at the sight.

“Inside, Dream, I need you inside me, *now*,” George insists, grabbing at Dream’s shoulders and tugging him up again. Dream chuckles, and presses a soft kiss against George’s lips. He’s surprised

when George deepens the kiss, completely undeterred by where Dream's mouth just was. In fact, he seems to be enjoying it, eagerly pushing his tongue further in, like he's chasing the taste of himself. It's so hot, Dream can feel his own erection throb painfully, and he quickly maneuvers out of own boxers and tosses them to the side. George keeps his mouth open, so they're breathing together, sharing the same air as his hand comes down to wrap around Dream's cock.

"Want to feel it," he pleads. "Want you to fill me up."

"Jesus," Dream exhales brokenly.

"So big," George continues, half-delirious. He uses his thumb to smear the pre-cum collecting at the tip of Dream's dick around before stroking down along its length slowly, torturously. Dream presses his mouth against George's shoulder, muffling a cry. "You're so big, it drives me fucking crazy. Thought about your fingers inside me all the time, your dumb, fucking huge hands."

Dream laughs against George's skin, before pressing a swift kiss against the hollow of his collarbone.

"I can't believe you just called my hands dumb," he says. George laughs as well.

"They are," he drawls. "So dumb."

Dream grins as he reaches over to open the drawer of his bedside table. Luckily, he doesn't have to move far to grab the small, half-empty bottle of lube that's inside.

"I have condoms too," he says, looking back at George. "If you-"

"No," George says, sounding completely sure of himself. "No, I - I know we're both clean, so."

Right. Dream supposes that was a strange, if helpful, by-product of having sex with your best friend. They already knew everything about each other, including how long it had been since either of them had done...well, anything, basically. It's such a silly thing, but Dream can't help but smile. It doesn't even feel daunting, despite how new everything is. He feels safe. Understood.

He comes back to position himself over George's chest, then reaches up to grab a pillow from the pile near the top of his bed.

"Here," he says, handing it to George. "For your hips, if you want."

Slowly, George takes the pillow, a grin breaking out over his face. Dream cocks his head to the side, confused.

"What?" He asks. George says nothing, just props himself up on his elbows and leans in, planting a kiss on the tip of Dream's nose.

"Nothing," he says. "Now come on. I'm tired of waiting."

George places the pillow underneath his tailbone, and Dream helps guide his leg up towards his shoulder, placing a kiss on his ankle as he does, which makes George giggle. Dream's still feeling a bit overstimulated, his hands shaking slightly as he uncaps the small bottle. George clearly notices, because he begins running a steady hand over Dream's chest.

"You good?" He asks, his voice soft.

"Yeah," Dream assures, smiling down at him. "I just want it to be nice, you know?"

"It already *is* nice," George says earnestly.

"No, but *really* nice," Dream insists. "If I had known we were gonna do this I would've gone out and bought the nicest lube in the world. Real gourmet shit."

"You're an idiot," George says with a laugh, and Dream can feel himself relax.

"You'll tell me if I hurt you, alright?" He asks. "Or if I do something wrong?"

"Dream," George says, his tone firm yet kind. "I trust you."

The words settle warm in Dream's heart, and he nods, leaning down to press another kiss against George's forehead before slicking up his fingers. George watches the whole process with rapt attention, eyes coming to meet Dream's as Dream positions himself over his hole, fingers just barely pressing against the entrance. With a great deal of care, Dream begins to push the first finger inside. George's breath hitches, but he relaxes around Dream a few moments later, working himself down onto his finger with ease.

"More," he demands breathlessly. "More, Dream, please."

Dream nods, pushing another finger in, completely overwhelmed by how tight George is, how amazing he feels. He wasn't gonna last very long when he was inside him if *this* was already causing him to unravel.

He presses his fingers deeper, past the knuckle, and George moans, his face flushed pink and shining with sweat. Dream watches, completely enraptured, and flexes his fingers, feeling the way George tenses around him. George reaches out a hand, grabbing for the bedsheet and bunching it up in his grasp.

"Dream, Dream," he repeats senselessly, head arching back, exposing the pale column of his throat.

"Does that feel good, baby?" Dream asks, bringing his fingers out and then thrusting them back in again, making George writhe beneath him. He's getting the hang of it now, not feeling so skittish anymore as he works his fingers back inside, finding the spot that makes George whine.

"Yes," he says. "Fuck, yes, Dream, it's good, it's good. You're so good to me."

Dream's breathing stutters as George looks up at him, eyes glassy and dark beneath the half-moon of his eyelids. It's almost frightening, the way George is making him feel right now. Dream didn't even think people were *supposed* to feel like this. He certainly never had before. It feels almost monstrous, how badly he wants him. Like it's transforming him from the inside out.

Momentarily overcome, he leans forward and presses his lips against George's, parting them easily with his tongue and kissing him deeply. He keeps their mouths together as he slides his third finger in, swallowing George's gasp. George throws an arm over Dream's shoulder and begins rocking his hips shallowly, adjusting to the stretch.

"You're - *ha*," George begins when they part, letting out a shaky laugh. "You're better than I imagined."

Dream presses their foreheads together, a smile overtaking his face.

"You are too," he says. "And I imagined it. A lot."

“Oh, I know I am,” George says, grinning. Dream scoffs. Despite the fact that George is open and willing beneath him, Dream still got the sense that their push and pull hadn’t ceased, that George would just as easily come apart for him as he’d turn around and flip the dynamic, remind Dream of just how much power he held. It was so typical, Dream can’t help but smile. What wasn’t typical, however, is that usually when George got like this, Dream didn’t have his fingers inside of him, and he couldn’t shift his position ever so slightly and leave George breathless, his hips rocking more rhythmically now, silently begging for more. Feeling satisfied, Dream slowly removes his fingers, which earns him a sharp glare from George. Then, George sees him squirt some more lube onto his hand, spreading it down along the length of his cock, and the look on his face changes. His eyes flit back up to meet Dream’s as Dream brings his other hand up to cup George’s jaw, keeping their eyes locked as he moves to position himself in front of his hole again.

“Go on then,” George mutters impatiently, but Dream can hear a small tremor in his voice, betraying him.

“I’ve got you,” Dream reassures, and George seems to weaken at the words, his expression opening up into something more tender, more vulnerable.

“I know,” he murmurs. Dream adjusts his posture, but doesn’t break eye contact as he slowly starts to slide in, the tip of his cock breaching George’s entrance with little resistance. George’s eyes slide shut, mouth parting in a soft *O* as Dream presses himself in deeper. Dream shivers, the warm, tight pressure making his entire body feel hypersensitive, to the point where he has to stall his movement, just so he doesn’t lose himself entirely.

“How far in are you?” George manages to ask, already sounding completely worked over. Dream’s thumb rubs comforting circles along his cheekbone.

“‘Bout halfway,” Dream says, and George opens his eyes to stare at him.

“Halfway?” He grits, then shuts his eyes again, throwing his elbow over his face. “God, you are *such* a dick.”

Dream laughs, bending down to kiss George’s cheek before finally removing his hand. He brings it down to George’s hip instead, resting just above the swell of his ass.

“We can stop, if you want,” Dream offers. George peeks out from under his elbow, glaring at him.

“Don’t you dare,” he insists. “Come on, deeper. I want it.”

Dream nods, and uses his hand to raise George’s hips up a bit, shifting his position so he can slide in further. George makes a punched out sound as Dream finally bottoms out inside of him, clenching around him in a way that makes Dream’s limbs feel like they’re on fire.

“Jesus, you feel amazing,” he breathes, forcing his body to still, not wanting to give George too much too soon. As if sensing his hesitancy, George hooks his arm around Dream’s back, hand splaying out across his shoulder blade, almost like he’s hugging him.

“Move, Dream. Please,” he says, and Dream never could say no to him.

Dream begins grinding his hips forward, picking up a steady pace as George’s neck arches back, breaths turning into gasps turning into high, desperate whines. Dream can feel sharp pinpricks of pain against his back as George’s fingernails dig into his skin, and Dream increases his rhythm, fucking into him. George cries out, pressing a hand over his face, but Dream catches his wrist, pulling it away. George stares up at him, lips parted, and Dream just watches him for a moment,

watches as George comes apart inch by inch, until it's almost too much to bear and Dream has to look away, bringing his mouth down to suck harshly at the slope of George's throat.

"Fuck," George cries. "Harder, Dream, please."

Dream's teeth scrape at the tender skin as his thrusts increase, and both of them moan at the change. George begins stroking himself, trying to match Dream's pace.

"Fill me up so well," he says blearily. "Want - *uh*, want to feel you cum inside me."

Dream groans, feeling his own orgasm swell inside of him with startling speed. He slows his rhythm but keeps the thrusts firm, hitting George's prostate with every drive of his hips.

"God, George," he exhales, less of a sentence and more of a sound, George's name coming to him easily even in his thoughtless haze.

"*Dream*," George responds, like he's filling in a blank. Dream shudders, his hand pressing firmly into the valley of George's hip, just below his stomach.

"I'm close," he warns. George grins, mouthing along Dream's jaw greedily.

"Gonna let me watch?" He asks. "Gonna be a good boy and make a mess for me?"

Dream huffs out a laugh and catches George's mouth with his own. He snaps his hips back up, burying himself inside George again, and George's breath is cut in half.

"You first," Dream insists, working his hips forward with a bruising intensity. George comes undone, his head thrown back and eyes closed, the spots on his skin where Dream placed his mouth already beginning to purple. He looks *marked*. The thought sends a pleasant shiver down Dream's spine. "God, you look so fucking beautiful right now, all bruised up. All mine."

"Dream," George whimpers, hands tangling useless in the bedsheet beside him.

"I'm all yours, George, come on," Dream soothes. "I'll take care of you."

George's back arches up and he's gone, releasing all over his own fist, painting his stomach with streaks of white. Dream is only a moment behind him, his thrusts coming to a shuddering stop as he finishes inside of George, brain giving way to a delirious, blinding heat as the pleasure snakes through his whole body and leaves him a single breath, emptying him completely. He does his best not to collapse on top of him, but George catches most of his weight all the same, allowing Dream to lie down heavily against his chest. He presses a kiss to the side of Dream's head, a hand immediately coming up to tangle in his hair.

"So fucking good for me, Dream," he breathes. "So perfect."

Dream flushes at the words, pressing his face into George's shoulder.

"Stop," he mutters, not meaning it. George's hand tugs at his hair, and Dream gasps, allowing his head to be pulled back so George can look him in the eye.

"You are," George insists, the hand turning gentle, petting. His lips quirk up into a smile. "And pretty, too."

Dream chuckles, bumping his nose against George's jaw.

"I knew it," he says triumphantly. "I knew you liked calling me that."

George just hums, and allows Dream to lie back down on top of him, their chests pressed together. The aftermath of his orgasm has left him feeling completely worn out, but even then, Dream soon becomes aware of the cum smeared between them, not to mention the fact that he still hasn't even pulled out yet.

"Ok, c'mon," he mutters. George groans as Dream slowly separates them. The second he's out, George tries to tug him back down, which Dream valiantly resists. "No, George, we have to clean up."

"Why?" George demands, adjusting himself against the pillows. *He's getting used to me not being inside him*, Dream realizes, and immediately pushes that thought aside, already knowing the kind of impact it will have on his brain.

"Cause we're covered in cum," Dream states, gesturing to George's stomach, his hand, their surroundings in general.

"Hm, I don't mind," George says. "Maybe you can eat it off of me."

Dream balks at him, but George just grins, his tongue poking out between his teeth.

"You are.." Dream trails off, a disbelieving smile emerging on his face. "You are an actual freak, oh my God."

"You like it," George says with an easy shrug. Not to be out done, Dream leans down and, very slowly and deliberately, licks a stripe up George's stomach, cleaning some of the cum off his skin. George stares down at him, eyes blown out, and Dream cranes his neck up to capture George's mouth in a kiss, pressing their tongues together languidly.

"Yeah," he murmurs after he pulls away. "I do."

George looks completely shocked for a moment, face flushed and breathing heavy. Dream drinks it in, wishing he had a photographic memory so he could file this moment away and keep it forever in perfect clarity. Then, George smiles, and if Dream didn't know any better, he'd say he's never seen him this happy before. Maybe that was wishful thinking, but part of Dream was willing to consider that perhaps now, like so many other times, without words even having to be exchanged, they were completely on the same page.

Dream does end up getting them a washcloth, and besides some stains on the sheets that will definitely need to be laundered out, they clean themselves off pretty well. George stays in bed the whole time, and when Dream comes back after discarding the cloth in the laundry bin, he opens his arms up, beckoning for Dream to join him. Dream grins, flopping back down on top of him and laying his head on his chest, directly above his heart. George immediately wraps his arms around Dream's shoulders, holding him there in a tight embrace.

"You're clingy after sex," Dream remarks, unable to hide how much he loves it in his tone.

"You're clingy all the time," George retorts. Dream wraps his arms George's waist, as if to confirm his statement.

"Mhm," he agrees. "And it's only gonna get worse now. I'm gonna start carrying you around like a backpack."

George laughs, breath tickling the top of Dream's head. Now that the bubble of warmth that had

built up around them has been broken, Dream feels unnaturally chilled, the cool air from the AC making the hair on his arms stand up. He shivers a bit, which prompts George to look down at him.

“Cold?” He asks. Dream nods, and George silently reaches over and tugs a blanket over them. Dream hums happily, burying his face further in George’s chest.

“You think we can read each other’s minds?” He asks, only half-joking.

“I actually used to think about that a lot,” George says. Dream glances up at him, surprised, but George looks like he’s being serious. “There were all these times back when I was in London where I’d be thinking about something and then two seconds later you’d text me about that exact thing. It was so weird.”

“Maybe we just think about a lot of the same stuff,” Dream suggests.

“Maybe,” George concedes. “But, I don’t know, it was about more than just thinking the same stuff. It was like...I’d be having a really shitty day, and I wouldn’t tell anyone about it, I’d just be *thinking* about how shitty I felt, and then you’d text me something dumb that made me laugh, and I’d think oh, Dream knew I was feeling bad. Even though you definitely didn’t.”

“I could always tell when you were feeling bad though,” Dream insists. “Even when you didn’t tell me.”

It feels a bit ridiculous to say, like he was somehow feeding into this weird psychic connection theory, but it was the truth. Even when they were far apart, Dream had become so well versed in George’s behavior and moods, to the point where the smallest thing stood out to him. Like if George didn’t text him chess updates, or if he didn’t Snapchat him a photo of his breakfast, Dream would know something was off. He supposes in hindsight that, to George, it did look a bit like Dream was sensing his mood, but really, it was just because Dream paid attention. When it came to George, he always did.

George cards a hand through Dream’s hair, something Dream notices he was doing more and more. He grins, titling his head further into George’s hand, encouraging him to continue.

“I always appreciated that,” George murmurs, his voice gone quiet, almost shy. Dream shifts his position so he can prop himself up on his elbow, looking down at George’s face. George’s hand ceases its movement for a brief moment before coming down to rest on Dream’s cheek. For some reason, it sort of makes Dream want to cry. He can’t remember the last time someone was this gentle with him, like Dream is something *worth* being careful with. It makes him feel fragile and shrunk down, vulnerable in a way he hasn’t let himself be in years.

“What d’you mean?” Dream asks. George purses his lips, but this time, he doesn’t retreat. He just sighs, a small smile coming over his face.

“How I never had to say that sort of stuff out loud,” he says. “Not with you.”

Dream nods, feeling the weight of George’s gaze bore into him. He’s sure there’s more beneath the surface that George has yet to disclose, but Dream doesn’t want to push. He wants to make George feel safe. As safe as he makes him feel.

“I meant what I said before, you know,” he says softly. “Whatever you want, George.”

“And what about what you want?” George asks gravely. Dream shrugs, offering him a smile.

“I thought that was obvious,” he says. “George, I want *you*. That’s not gonna change.”

George blinks, eyes going watery. Before Dream can open his mouth to speak again, George is surging forward, capturing his lips in a crushing kiss. It doesn't feel like any of the last times. This time, it feels like George is trying to *speak* to him, like he's putting everything he can't say into the press of his lips, the soft slide of his tongue. Dream wraps an arm around George's neck, holding him closer, and when they break apart, Dream realizes his eyes have gone damp too. He feels broken open in the wake of it, like if George wanted to, he could reach straight into Dream's chest and put his hand around his heart. And Dream would let him, too. That was the scary part. With every passing moment, Dream was realizing that there was nothing he'd say no to, nothing that would go too far. Dream still didn't even know exactly what they were doing, he had no idea what this would change for them, but he did know with absolutely certainty that he already belonged to George, in every sense of the word. There was no doubt in his mind about that.

George looks at him, his expression torn between relief and something sadder. Dream lets out a shaky breath, suddenly compelled to look down, the emotion rising inside of him making his eyes sting.

"George, I—"

Then, from somewhere on the floor, Dream hears something vibrate. He frowns, craning his neck over the edge of the bed to see his phone poking out from the pocket of his discarded pants. He reaches down to grab it, then grabs George's as well from its place on the floor a bit further away. When he comes back to lie beside George, passing him his phone as he does, he realizes they've both got the same notification on their screen. A text from Sapnap, in the group-chat labeled *the boyzzz*:

yo was someone making scrambled eggs lol

Dream's mouth drops open as he turns to look at George. George meets his eyes and *cackles*, his entire body shaking with the force of his laughter.

"Oh my God," Dream says, completely mortified. "Oh my God, what do we say?"

"Nothing," George says, still laughing. "Let him come find us."

Dream reaches over and smacks George's arm, which just makes him laugh harder, curling in on himself and leaning heavily against Dream's side.

"I'm serious," Dream insists. "That looks so suspicious, what the hell are we gonna tell him?"

"I don't know! This is your fault anyway," George says. "You are so dumb, why did you leave the pan there in the first place?"

"Oh, I don't know George, why didn't I stop to do the dishes earlier? Let me think," Dream replies flatly. "I feel like I remember being busy with something else."

George laughs again, and this time, Dream can't fight the smile breaking out across his own face.

"We're so stupid," he says, shaking his head.

"*You're* stupid," George clarifies. "I am completely faultless here. Entirely innocent."

"No, no," Dream says, leaning into George's space, poking an accusing finger into his ribs. George giggles, trying to bat Dream's hand away. "Those eggs were a ploy on your part. You were trying to seduce me."

“Seduce you?” George demands.

“Yes! If anything, *I’m* the innocent one here.”

“Oh, please,” George scoffs. “You are not innocent.”

Dream puts on a pout and George rolls his eyes, but then Dream resumes his attack on his ribcage, and George is lost in breathless laughter again. They tussle for a moment, before George captures Dream’s hand in his own and pushes it back firmly against the mattress, using the momentum to climb onto Dream’s lap. He positions himself over his hips, thighs bracketing his body on either side. Dream grins at the change, linking their fingers together.

“Whoa,” George says. “Did I just beat you in a fight?”

“Oh, come on,” Dream snorts. “That was *not* a fight. I let you do that anyway.”

“Sure, Dream, whatever helps you sleep at night.”

Still keeping their hands locked together, Dream uses his other hand to loft himself upward and kiss George, already struggling to comprehend the fact that there was a time only a few hours ago where he wasn’t getting to do this whenever he wanted. What a miserable existence. Dream feels incredibly sorry for his past self.

George smiles against his lips, then bites down, taking Dream’s lower lip between his teeth. Dream groans at the sensation, the small spark of pain making his toes curl. When George pulls away and looks at him, Dream feels completely awestruck.

“I’m still planning on eating you at some point,” George says, smiling widely. “Just so you’re aware.”

“Something tells me you have a lot of plans for me,” Dream chuckles, nosing at George’s jaw.

“You have no idea,” George sighs, and captures his lips again.

Dream isn’t sure how long they stay there. George does end up responding to Sapnap eventually, saying that he had started making the eggs and then got bored halfway through which, remarkably, Sapnap believes without question. Dream is reading over his shoulder the whole time George types it out, muffling laughter against his skin. Morning has long since slipped into afternoon and the sky outside the window is clear and blue. When George turns around again, tossing his phone aside and taking Dream’s face in his hands, Dream is struck with the understanding that, once he steps outside of this room, it will be into a world that has irrevocably changed. Maybe no one else will notice, but Dream is certain he will. As long as he isn’t alone, though, he figures he can handle it.

For now, he stays, and kisses George again, and again, and again, until their bodies fall into each other once more and time slips out of their grasps, carried away as easily as the breeze, leaving only warmth in its wake.

Steak

Dream wakes up to a dry mouth and an elbow shoved into the soft part underneath his ribs, like the bone is trying to burrow its way inside. He lets out a grunt, shifting onto his side to alleviate the pressure.

Next to him in bed, a frown crosses George's sleeping face, and his body follows Dream, a heat seeking missile drawn back against his chest. Silently, Dream opens his arms, and George falls easily into place, head pillowed underneath his sternum. He huffs, forehead smoothing out once more, and Dream listens as his breathing becomes even, tickling the soft flesh between the tendons of his throat.

It's early, still before sunrise, and through the small gap in the curtain Dream can see the indigo sky, the exact same color as a mussel's outer shell. He still feels barely awake, but he's certain this isn't a dream. His dreams are never this soft.

When he glances down, he's only half-surprised to see George peering back up at him, his eyes wide and brown.

"Stop thinking so loud," he says, his voice hoarse with sleep. Dream smiles.

"Sorry, one sec." He lets his eyes go unfocused and George snorts at the sight. "Ok there. No more thoughts."

"Good, we're back to normal," George quips and Dream pinches the soft flesh of his shoulder.

"Sorry," he says a moment later. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't," George assures. "I can sleep through anything."

"Oh, I know." Dream chuckles. "Trust me, I've tried to wake you before."

"Why would you do that?" George asks, sounding incredibly offended. Dream rolls his eyes.

"Cause..." He trails off, watching as a stray piece of hair makes a slow migration down George's forehead into his eyes. He sighs, contentment turning his insides as soft as the earth after rain. His real explanation (that George was prone to sleep through important things, recording sessions, meetings, etc.) slips easily out of his mind. What he says instead is: "I miss you when you're asleep."

George's expression morphs into a pleased smile and he buries his head in Dream's chest again, letting out a noise somewhere between a groan and (George would kill him if he knew Dream described *any* of his noises like this) a squeal.

"You're disgusting," George mutters against his skin, and Dream laughs, snaking an arm up and holding George's waist. His skin is warm and soft, and Dream is hit with the sudden, pressing desire to bury his nose in it and inhale, like he's seen people do to the top of babies' heads.

"What?" He demands. "No, I'm not. I'm *sweet*, George. I'm being sweet."

"Yeah," George confirms, peeking up at him again. "Like I said. *Disgusting*."

Dream grins, knowing well enough by now that this was nothing more than posturing on George's

part. This thought is confirmed when George leans up and places a kiss at the dip of Dream's clavicle, in the hollow space below his neck. Such an odd place to focus his affection, and yet the moment George does it, Dream wants him to do it again. Sometimes, he got the weird feeling that George knew the places that Dream wanted to be touched even before Dream himself had discovered them.

In his arms, George lets out another strange noise, and then he flops over, away from Dream, lying flat on his back like a starfish. Dream echoes the noise, which earns him a pointed look, though something in George's expression betrays the fact that he's trying not to look too endeared.

"It's too hot," he states. "Make it cooler."

"The AC is already on high," Dream points out, rolling over onto his side to face him, already hating the (objectively pretty small) bit of distance that now exists between them. "Besides, you always complain about how I keep it too cold in this house."

"Yes, well it *was* too cold," George says, eyes suddenly drawn up towards the ceiling. "When I was sleeping alone."

Dream doesn't respond right away, just watches George in profile, the dim light of the room painting him in soft focus. They hadn't even been sleeping together, in both senses of the phrase, for very long and yet already Dream feels like the alternative would be borderline inhumane. He'd never been great at being alone, he could admit that, but this was different. George wasn't just a warm body beside him. If he were to wake up tomorrow without George next to him, he'd miss *him*; his strange sleep-mutterings, his tendency to kick off the covers, his ability to make all 6'3" of Dream feel tiny in his arms, despite their difference in size.

There's also the much more frightening aspect of it, which is that as hard as he might try, Dream can't imagine himself ever wanting to wake up beside anyone else. But that isn't something he needs to voice out loud.

"Hey," George murmurs after a moment. Dream's focus returns to him, just in time for George to reach forward and flick him lightly on the forehead. "Where'd you go?"

"Nowhere," Dream assures, offering a smile. "I'm right here."

George nods, then curls onto his side, mirroring Dream's posture. He's got on a black t-shirt and an old, faded pair of Dream's boxers, riding low on his hips. Instead of withdrawing his hand fully, he simply lowers it, tracing the lines of Dream's face with his thumb, just like he'd done on his first night in the house. Dream laughs quietly.

"Still not used to it?" He asks, teasing. George's eyes flit up to meet his own.

"No," he says earnestly. Dream stares at him, caught off guard by his response. "Sometimes..."

George cuts himself off, letting out a quiet, humorless laugh. His hand retracts, but Dream catches it in his own before he can move too far away. He links their fingers together loosely, running his thumb along the ridge of George's knuckles.

"What?" He prompts. As much as he wanted to give George his space, he was also realizing that, sometimes, George really did just wanna be asked. George looks down at their hands, then back up at Dream.

"Sometimes, back in London," he begins slowly. "I would have these...weird dreams."

Dream frowns. They'd had plenty of conversations about their sleeping habits, dreams included, but George had never broached a conversation about them so seriously before. Dream squeezes his hand tighter, the pressure between them making sweat spring up on his palm.

"It would be like..." George takes a breath, eyes drifting off to focus on something over Dream's shoulder. "I would be in a house, at the end of a really, really long hallway. And I'd try to get to the other end, I'd be running there, but it was like...like my feet were sticky or something. Or time was all weird and slow and I just couldn't run fast enough, or get to the end of the hallway. It was so frustrating. I *hated* it."

His eyes return to Dream's face, features still woven together in a frown.

"Sorry," he murmurs. "I don't know why I brought that up."

Dream shakes his head. "Don't apologize. I - I'm sorry. That does sound frustrating."

George just hums, rolling over onto his back again. Dream briefly considers asking what was at the end of that long, long hallway. He has a feeling he already knows.

"George," he says softly. George doesn't react, so Dream squeezes his hand again, which finally prompts him to turn his head, cheek pressed flat against the pillow. "If you hadn't gotten here when you did..."

He trails off. George's expression softens at the sight and he squeezes Dream's hand back, a silent gesture of encouragement.

"I honestly don't know what the hell I would've done," Dream finally admits.

The words feel heavier than he anticipated. They went back and forth plenty while George was still in London about how difficult it was not being together, but this felt different. It wasn't just that Dream had *wanted* George in America with him. He *needed* him. Maybe he hadn't been able to admit that to himself early on, but somewhere down the line, it became abundantly clear to him that there was a threshold to this, a point they'd cross where Dream wouldn't be able to continue as normal if George wasn't by his side. The thought makes him feel desperate and a bit childish. Sure, they joke about it sometimes, how needy Dream can be, but to actually be so dependent on another person, to need someone *that* badly...it goes far beyond the boundaries of "normal" and into a territory Dream is still incredibly reluctant to explore.

Because at the center of it all, he knows he'll find that same, unavoidable truth: Dream doesn't want for now or for five years. He wants forever. Needs it, in fact, needs *this*, for the rest of his life. And that doesn't sound to him like the type of thing you're supposed to say to your best friend that you only just started hooking up with a couple of days ago.

Then, with a kind tilt to his smile, George says: "Me neither. It's a good thing I got here when I did."

It's so simple, so matter-of-fact, that Dream can't help but smile. George lets out a laugh and finally breaks his hand out of Dream's grasp, opening his arms up to him instead. Dream's grin deepens as he scoots closer and presses his face into the space between George's collar and jaw.

"A very good thing," he agrees, voice muffled. "One of the best things, honestly."

"*One* of the best things?" George demands, craning his neck to look down at him. "What was better than me coming here? Answer quickly."

“I mean, the day I got Patches, that was pretty great,” Dream says. He looks up to find George glaring at him and lets out a surprised laugh. “George, come on. You cannot seriously be jealous of *Patches*.”

“*Jealous?*” He demands. “I’m not - I’m not *jealous*. I’m just saying, the day I got here, Patches was already here, which means, by the transitive property, it was an objectively better day.”

“By the transitive property?” Dream echoes, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes, Dream, it’s called math,” he states plainly. “Have you ever heard of it?”

Instead of responding, Dream ducks his head back down, locating the sensitive part at the curve of George’s neck and blowing a fat raspberry against it. George lets out a cry, hands pawing at Dream’s shoulder in protest.

“Stop, oh my God!” He says between gasps of laughter, eyes going teary. “Dream!”

Dream lets himself get gently shoved away, smiling proudly. George looks down at him, and it actually knocks the wind right out of Dream, seeing how fond he looks. Dream melts back against him, turned to butter in his hands.

“*George*,” he sighs, trying to put everything he’s feeling into the space of his name.

“Dream,” George replies softly, like he understands.

“We should go back to bed,” he murmurs.

“You’re the one who woke up in the first place,” George reminds him.

“I only woke up cause your elbow was impaling me,” Dream points out.

There’s a pause, and Dream doesn’t even need to look up to know George is rolling his eyes.

“Oh, poor Dream,” he coos sarcastically. “Had to deal with my *elbow*. You literally rolled over on top of me the other night and I didn’t complain. You could’ve crushed me!”

“No, I couldn’t have,” Dream says. “And besides, you like when I’m on top of you.”

This time he does glance up. George’s eyes are narrowed, but his cheeks are flushed a bright, guilty pink. Dream pokes his tongue out between his teeth and grins, feeling victorious.

“And *I* like your dumb, pointy elbows,” he continues, raising George’s arm and kissing the offending spot in question. “And your tiny feet that kick me-”

“My feet are *not* tiny-” George insists.

“*And* the fact that you talk in your sleep, even though it’s a little creepy sometimes,” Dream finishes. George watches him for a moment, mouth twitching in the beginnings of an ill-concealed smile.

“You talk in your sleep too,” George points out. “More than me, some nights.”

“I know,” Dream confirms easily. “But I’m saying that I *like* that you talk in your sleep, even if you don’t like when I do it.”

“No, ok, that’s dumb,” George insists.

“Why?”

He shrugs. “Cause I like *everything* about you. So obviously that includes the sleep talking.”

Dream lofts himself up further now, positioning his elbows on either side of George’s head so he can look him in the eye.

“No you don’t,” he says. George cocks an eyebrow.

“Yes I do,” he insists.

“What?” Dream demands. “No, that’s - George, come on. You don’t like *everything* about me. You complain about stuff I do all the time! Just the other day you got annoyed cause you said I was being ‘too nice.’”

“You *were* being too nice,” George says. “You say yes to people too much.”

“I *like* saying yes to people.”

“I know,” George says, grinning. “I like that about you too.”

Dream stares at him. It feels like his brain is lagging, unable to process exactly what George is saying. George’s expression remains inscrutable, his lips tugged upwards in a small smile.

“I don’t get it,” Dream finally says. George laughs, then reaches up, putting his hands on either side of Dream’s face.

“Dream,” he begins firmly. “I still like the parts of you that annoy me sometimes.”

“But if they annoy you that means, by definition, that you don’t like them,” Dream protests.

“Who says?” George challenges.

Dream watches him for a moment, still feeling the persistent impulse to keep pushing. He isn’t even sure why, but a part of him feels incredibly reluctant to believe that *anyone* could like every part of himself, let alone someone like George, who’d arguably seen him at his worst. That just didn’t make sense.

Then, George’s thumb begins to make a small, stroking motion up the curve of Dream’s cheekbone and any desire to put up a fight melts away.

“Well, I like everything about you too,” Dream finally says. That part was easy. He already knew it was true.

“I know,” George says, still smiling. He tugs Dream forward, and Dream follows easily, allowing George to tilt his face and press their lips together. He’s smiling so wide that their teeth clash, which makes George laugh against his mouth. Dream places his hand firmly against the back of George’s head and deepens the kiss, licking past the seam of his lips and bringing their tongues together. George’s laugh gives way to a breathless sigh, and the sound shoots straight through Dream’s body, pooling somewhere low in his gut.

“I thought,” George murmurs when Dream pulls his mouth away to bite greedily at George’s jaw, “we were gonna go back to sleep.”

Dream grins, appreciating the light drag of George’s stubble against his skin. He shifts his posture, bringing his legs down onto either side of George’s hips and pressing their bodies together. George

arches up at the contact, arousal already growing against Dream's thigh.

"I changed my mind," he says, and places another kiss down onto his throat.

They do end up falling asleep again, much later, when the sun has just begun to rise. It's Dream who drifts off first, as he almost always does, with George holding him tightly against his chest, fingers rubbing soft circles in his hair. Right before he falls asleep completely, Dream swears he can feel the impression of lips pressed against the crown of his head before everything goes quiet.

It turns out that, even with all that is new between them, their routine doesn't really change. Well, ok. It does change, in the sense that Dream is suddenly having a *lot* more sex than he's ever had before, but other than that, many of the practicalities remain the same.

For example, George still spends most of his time sprawled out on Dream's bed, face tilted towards the AC, scrolling through TikToks or poking the back of Dream's chair with his foot, trying to get his attention. It becomes a lot harder to get work done, Dream can admit that to himself, but that was always the case with George in the house. It's just now George's methods of distraction have become all the more...persuasive.

It's not Dream's fault, really. George can just be very, *very* convincing when he wants to be.

They still watch movies in the living room with Sapnap at least once a week, but now, when he inevitably passes out halfway through, instead of insisting they put on something else, George just crawls over onto Dream's lap. Normally, Dream is able to get them up to the bedroom, but they've still had their fair share of close calls, including one where Sapnap let out a snore that startled Dream so badly, he practically launched George onto the floor.

George had *not* been happy after that. Dream insisted that it was bad roommate etiquette to make out while your other roommate was three feet away from you, even if he was asleep. George said he didn't care, and that if Dream really was *so* worried, they just wouldn't make out on the couch ever again.

It's no surprise who ended up winning that argument. Making out on the couch was *really* fun and who was Dream to deprive them of that? Sapnap was a heavy sleeper anyway.

The question of whether or not to tell Sapnap did linger in the air sometimes, as well as the broader implication that came along with it. Is this the type of thing they're supposed to share with their friends? George (rather stubbornly) never brought it up, but it still weighed on Dream. Are they supposed to just let everyone assume? Hope people put two and two together when they hear both of their voices coming from George's phone in the Discord call, too late at night for them to be anywhere other than in bed together? Of course, their friends could very well think that was normal behavior for the two of them, and frankly, they wouldn't be too far off. They had always acted like this, to a certain extent, and when Dream takes that into account, he realizes it would probably be a bit awkward to tell his friends the key thing that *had* actually changed between them.

But at the same time, Dream wants people to know. He wants *everyone* to know. He gets the random urge to tell their mailman, sometimes.

Tell him what, exactly, Dream still isn't quite sure. They hadn't really put a name to it yet, even though Dream is fairly certain there was one in particular that would apply. One that Dream caught himself wanting to use more and more frequently as time went on.

But that was fine. Dream has to keep reminding himself of that, that he can just enjoy whatever is happening between them without immediately getting all intense about it. It isn't like George has ever broached the topic either, which probably meant he's also fine with them just being... whatever they were. And if George is fine, Dream can be fine too.

Sure, an incredibly patronizing voice in his head pipes up. *Cause you've always been so good at being chill about things.*

Dream grimaces to himself. Ok, maybe he didn't have the best track record when it comes to being relaxed. But he's so, *so* desperate not to fuck this up, and with George, it was always so difficult to gauge when to push and when to fall back. The last thing in the world he wants is for George to suddenly retreat, especially because Dream has never seen him happier. And Dream is happy too. So happy, in fact, that sometimes it felt like someone was playing a trick on him. Surely his life can't be *this* amazing. Half the time it doesn't even feel real.

Like now, it's early afternoon, sometime after 1pm, and he's in the kitchen, making him and George French toast. They spent basically the entire morning hanging out in George's room, laying in bed and doing nothing, and it should've been boring, but the whole time, Dream felt practically giddy. He used to do shit like that all the time alone, before George arrived; lay in bed and scroll through Twitter, find some random YouTube video to watch, maybe tune into a friend's stream for a little while. But now, with George here, even the most mundane things felt so precious. It got to the point where Dream was tempted to try and preserve every, tiny detail, commit them all to memory, or share them with the world, as if to say "Look how fucking lucky I am." He'd be seconds away from opening Twitter and posting something like *George sneezed so loud that it startled Patches and she almost ran right into a chair or George just said that he's never seen a lizard up close before. WTF?* or *George is so cute when he's laughing at videos of cats. Also, we're holding hands right now :^)*

The tweets never actually got sent. But his drafts were really starting to fill up.

Eventually, they got bored (and hungry) and George headed off to shower while Dream made his way down to the kitchen. He honestly just planned to grab them some snacks, or maybe heat up a frozen pizza or something, but then he realized the loaf of bread they had was getting stale and he thought, fuck it. It's a little domestic, sure, but it's not like Dream had never made them breakfast before. Obviously George won't think anything of it. He'll just be happy there's French toast.

"Wow," George drawls, startling Dream. He turns his head and is greeted with the sight of George leaning up against the kitchen doorway, a small smirk on his face. He's in a tank top and a pair of black shorts. *Tiny* black shorts. *Since when does George own shorts like that?* They hit just above his mid-thigh, making his legs look absurdly, tantalizingly long. It's hot in their house, Dream can attest to that, but something about the outfit feels like it was picked out with more than just comfort in mind. It feels teasing.

Dream, for his part, has forgone a shirt altogether, a habit he's fallen back into easily over the past couple of warmest days. It's a choice George seems to be openly admiring right now. His eyes rake up and down Dream's torso, lingering on the place where his sweatpants rest, just below his hips. Dream stands up straighter, offering George a grin.

"Hey," he greets. "I'm making French toast."

George actually rolls his eyes. "Making us breakfast, huh? Aren't you just *so* perfect."

Dream shakes his head, sparing a glance back at the pan to turn the bread, making sure it doesn't burn.

“You know sarcasm doesn’t work when you actually mean what you’re saying, right?” He asks. He looks towards the doorway again, just in time to catch a glimpse of George’s smile before he ducks his head down, clearly trying to maintain his composure. It sends a pleasant curl of heat through Dream’s stomach, evidence of just how much he’s enjoying the fact that there’s still a chase here, still a game that can be won.

“You know that...you’re an idiot?” George counters a second later, coming to stand behind him. Dream scoffs, but any retort he may have made is lost when George tilts his chin up and rests it on his shoulder, trying to get a better look at the pan. Dream bites back a smile. It wasn’t exactly a secret that he liked being bigger than George. What he hadn’t expected is how much George liked it too.

Well, what he liked specifically was being able to climb Dream like a tree. It was like living with a monkey or something. Clingy didn’t even begin to describe it.

As if he can read his thoughts, George loops his arms around Dream’s neck, tugging him back and trying to loft himself up off the ground.

“Whoa!” Dream cautions, bringing a hand out and steadying himself against the counter. “Little warning next time.”

“Shut up and help me,” George mutters, pushing himself up again. Dream chuckles and reaches a hand back, broaching it against George’s thigh and allowing George to use his strength to help get himself up onto Dream’s back. The second he’s up, he wraps his legs around Dream’s waist, keeping his arms thrown loosely over his shoulders. With one hand still securely under his thigh, Dream turns to look back at him.

“Wanted a better view,” George says, grinning.

“Oh, I’m so sure,” Dream smirks. George butts his head against Dream’s cheek, hair tickling at his nose, as if prompting Dream to get back to work. Dream laughs and obeys, using his free hand to pick up the spatula and move the piece of bread off the pan and onto a plate. He’s already got a few pieces laid out, just enough for him and George, since Sapnap had already left early that morning for, and Dream didn’t believe him at first when he said this, *boxing class*. He’d gotten a personal trainer and everything. When Dream asked him why, he said he “needed to train to fight Quackity” and left it at that. Dream hadn’t bothered to ask any more questions.

With George still clinging onto his back, he turns off the stove and heads over to one of the cabinets, intent on tracking down the maple syrup. He’s about to start searching when he starts to feel the distinct impression of teeth, scraping lightly against his throat. He lets out a shaky breath, knees suddenly feeling weak.

“George,” he cautions.

“Hm?” George asks, not even bothering to lift his head fully. Dream smirks, shaking his head.

“You are obsessed with biting me,” Dream points out.

“You taste good,” George says plainly, as if that was a normal enough excuse, and then bites lightly at Dream’s shoulder, seeming to focus his attention on a particular smattering of freckles there. Dream turns his head and takes advantage of their position to press a kiss against the side of George’s temple. It’s certainly distracting, but he does his best to keep his grip on George’s thigh stable. He digs his fingers into his flesh harder, just shy of bruising, and George exhales against his skin, clearly enjoying the increased pressure.

“You like that?” Dream prompts, head still half turned, eyes trained on the top of George’s bent head. “Like when I manhandle you?”

George finally raises his head, but before he can conjure up a retort, Dream presses their lips together. George lets out a delicious gasp and Dream swallows it without missing a beat, parting his lips and plunging his tongue into George’s mouth. George actually *whimpers*, legs tightening around Dream’s waist until he’s got him in a vice grip, deepening their kiss even further. Eventually, Dream has to pull away, his neck already beginning to cramp. George stares at him, completely dazed, mouth swollen and slick with spit.

“God,” Dream murmurs reverently. “Look at you.”

“Tighter,” George says, breathless and demanding. “You can hold me tighter.”

Dream ducks his head down, already feeling completely overwrought. Still - he’s nothing if not a good listener. He adjusts his grip, slipping his hand underneath the fabric of George’s tiny, infuriating shorts and palming his bare thigh. This time, when he presses his fingers down, he’s determined to leave a mark.

George takes Dream’s chin in his hand and turns his head back towards him, bringing their mouths together in a messy, wet kiss. It’s sloppy and uncoordinated and so fucking hot that Dream can already feel himself growing hard in his sweatpants.

Then, George presses his hands flat against Dream’s chest and *grinds* his hips up against his back, moaning lewdly into Dream’s mouth at the contact. Dream gasps, bringing his head back to meet George’s eyes.

“Are you-” Dream exhales, unable to keep the awe out of his voice. “Are you getting hard from this?”

George doesn’t say anything, just moves his hips forward again, letting out a small sound at the friction.

“Fuck,” Dream swears. “George, you gotta - I don’t wanna drop you.”

Without missing a beat, George hops down easily off of Dream’s back, keeping their bodies pressed flush together. Dream gasps at the feeling of George’s clothed cock pressed up against his ass. But when he moves to turn around, George places a firm hand on his shoulder, keeping him there.

“Let me,” he murmurs, scraping his fingernails against the bare skin above Dream’s hip, leaving a thin trail of red marks behind. Dream gasps at the sensation, neck involuntarily arching back, like he’s being pulled on a puppet string. George’s hand continues down, wraps around Dream’s cock over his sweatpants. Immediately, Dream flushes, acutely aware of the fact that George can clearly tell he’s got nothing on underneath. George presses his mouth against Dream’s shoulder, smiling into his skin.

“What’s this?” He asks, dragging his hand lazily along the outline of Dream’s growing erection. “You forgot how to dress yourself properly?”

“Says you,” Dream shoots back, unable to stop himself from pushing his hips forward. George senses his eagerness, loosens his grip. Dream lets out a frustrated sigh, the teasing leaving him lightheaded. “Walked in here wearing basically nothing in those tiny fucking shorts.”

“Basically nothing?” George echoes, his fingers ghosting maddeningly along the light trail of hair

underneath Dream's naval. "That's awfully hypocritical, coming from you."

"Thought you liked when I didn't wear a shirt," Dream replies, doing his damndest to keep his voice steady. "You certainly *seem* to like it."

"I do," George responds easily. His hand, mercifully, dips just below Dream's waistband. He's not even anywhere close to touching his cock, and yet Dream already feels fucking dizzy, so desperate he's leaking pre-cum, staining the front of his sweatpants.

"*Shit*," he breathes, unable to keep the shakiness out of his voice. George leans up and bites at his earlobe, sending a sharp, pleasant spark of pain coursing through Dream's body, leaving him trembling.

"I like when you wear nothing for me," George says, his voice low. This time, when Dream bucks his hips forward, George snakes his hand down to meet him. He wraps his fingers around Dream's cock, beginning to stroke him lazily, like he's expecting Dream to do all the work. Dream, ever the over-achiever, starts to fuck up into his hand immediately, chasing the friction of George's palm.

"Good," George coos in his ear, before sinking his teeth down into the soft flesh of Dream's shoulder. *Jesus*, Dream thinks hazily. *I'm gonna have George's teethmarks on me.*

Somehow, that thought gets him just as worked up as George's hand on his cock. *Mine*, George seems to be saying with every pull of fingers, every bruise he leaves behind. *Mine, mine, mine.*

"Fuck, George, c'mon," Dream groans, eyes sliding shut as George swipes his thumb over the head of Dream's weeping cock.

"Be patient," George insists, an edge of bossiness entering his tone. Now why the fuck was *that* so hot? Blearily, Dream nods, trying desperately to do as he says. As if he can sense this, George removes his hand, but before Dream can react, he's moving to the waistband of Dream's sweatpants, trying to tug them down. "Get these off. Now."

Dream doesn't have to be told twice. George gets his pants down to his thighs, and Dream does the rest of the work, tugging them down and kicking them off. He doesn't even have a moment to feel weird about the fact that he's fully naked standing in their kitchen before George has pressed their bodies together again, and begins rutting himself up against Dream's ass, erection straining against the front of his shorts.

Dream laughs throatily, his thoughts still a foggy, turned on mess. George presses his forehead against Dream's back, between his shoulder blades, and Dream can feel the slick sweat collecting there.

"Gonna get off like this?" He asks, trying to sound less like he's on the edge of coming completely undone. "I haven't even touched you yet, baby."

"Shut up," George grits out. "I want- *fuck* -"

He stops himself with a groan and immediately a warm rush of affection rises in Dream's throat, a sudden bloom of tenderness in the midst of everything. He knew what George was implying, obviously, but clearly it wasn't something George felt like he could articulate yet. Dream smiles and reaches back to where George's hands are secured tightly on his hips. He places his hand over George's, enveloping it completely and keeping it there.

"I want it," he assures. "I want you to fuck me, George."

George gasps, hips bucking forward involuntarily. It's not like they hadn't come close to doing this before. George had fingered him a few times already, and while at first Dream needed some time to adapt to the sensation, now he could admit that he was incredibly curious to know what *more* would feel like, how it would feel to have something thicker, longer inside of him. How it would feel to have *George*, specifically.

His cock twitches at the mere thought, and Dream moans, resting the urge to reach down and start touching himself. He needs to wait. He needs to be good.

"Ok," George purrs, all hesitancy melted away in a single breath. "Then bend over."

There's a pretty immediate follow-up there, resting on the tip of Dream's tongue, but then he hears some rustling behind him, and the sound of a small bottle being uncapped, and, *holy shit* - ?

Dream turns around fully now, staring at George, who is frozen, looking up at him with a small bottle of lube in his hand. Dream looks at the bottle, then back at him.

"You brought lube into the kitchen?"

Slowly, George nods.

"I mean, I knew we had an empty house, so I just thought-" George cuts himself off, shrugging. A grin breaks out over Dream's face.

"Oh my God," he says. "You want me so bad it's actually ridiculous."

George lets out a startled laugh, shoving at Dream's face. "You're an idiot. I was just thinking ahead! God forbid one of us around here is actually *prepared*-"

Before he can say anything else, Dream swoops down and kisses him, cutting him off mid-thought. He takes his time with it, running his tongue along the seam of George's lips and pressing in deeper, further, until George is melting against him, grabbing at Dream's shoulders like he needs a safe place to land.

"You're really fucking hot, you know that?" Dream murmurs when he pulls away, hot breath lingering between them like the remnants of a storm. George grins, lips curling at the corners in a way that makes Dream's head spin.

"I know," George says, that same smugness entering his tone again, enunciating every syllable as he speaks. "Now bend over."

This time, Dream listens. He turns around again, leaning forward against the cool marble of the counter. His skin is already damp with sweat, but this doesn't seem to deter George at all, as he lays a trail of kiss along the back of his neck, down to the crest of his spine. It's sweet, almost playful, and Dream finds himself grinning into the crook of his elbow, even as he braces himself.

There's a pause, then the feeling of a slick finger being pressed against his hole, and Dream lets out a jagged exhale. George brings his other hand up and places it securely on his waist, gentle and reassuring, and Dream sighs, letting his eyes slide shut as his body slowly relaxes.

"So good, Dream," George murmurs. "Being so good for me right now."

Dream groans, pressing his forehead against the marble, seeking some relief from the overwhelming heat coursing through his body. He can feel himself getting stretched out even more as George presses another finger in, so slowly that Dream can't tell if he's trying to be careful or if

he's trying to torment him. Dream thinks it may be a little bit of both.

"More," Dream manages to get out, pushing his hips back further. "Come on, I can take it."

George huffs out a laugh. "Always so competitive."

Dream grins, but before he can speak, all the breath is pushed out of him as George begins moving his fingers deeper. Before, Dream was so focused on adjusting himself to the sensation of having something inside of him, he didn't even give himself the chance to enjoy how fucking amazing it feels. Now, his entire body feels awake to it, pleasure coursing through him like an electric current.

George lays a hand on the small of Dream's back, right above the arch of his spine, and Dream allows himself to give way completely, letting out a small, punched out sound as George starts moving his fingers in and out, opening him further.

"I'm ready," he says, already eager for more. "I wanna feel you, George."

"What's the magic word?" George asks teasingly, so confident and in control Dream genuinely fears he may fall apart at the sound of his voice alone.

"*Please*," he breathes, too blissed out to care about how breathy his voice has become. "Please, George, please fuck me, c'mon."

"Good boy," George says lowly, and Dream's cock jumps at the words.

Jesus Christ. "You're gonna fucking kill me," Dream says aloud. George pulls his fingers out, slowly, and Dream does his best to keep his breathing even, hands white knuckling the counter in an attempt to keep from touching himself. Then, after another moment, Dream can feel the head of George's cock press against his hole.

"*Dream*," George sighs, so sweet, and Dream groans, feeling the pressure build up inside of him as George begins pushing in at an achingly slow pace.

"God," Dream groans as George moves deeper, biting down harshly on his lip, trying to maintain some semblance of control. "Fu- *George*."

"What?" George prompts, much breather than he was before, which Dream is able to take some measure of pride in. "Want me to go faster, Dream? Harder?"

"Yes, yes," Dream practically begs, abandoning all hope he had of sounding anything other than completely and utterly desperate. "Want you - *ah* - want you so fucking bad, George, wanna be yours--"

"You are," George says, splaying a hand out possessively over Dream's waist. Finally, *finally*, George bottoms out, hips pressed flush against Dream's ass, eliciting a low moan from his throat. "*Fuck*, you're mine. All mine, Dream, you hear that?"

"I am," Dream babbles. "I am, I'm yours, please, George--"

The thrusts are shallow at first, but soon George finds the right angle and Dream lets out a strangled shout, so shocked at the feeling that his legs almost give out from under him.

"Alright, pretty?" George prompts, slowing his thrusts for a moment, the hand on Dream's waist rubbing soft, reassuring circles in his overheated skin.

“Yes,” Dream chokes out. “Jesus, George, yes, keep going.”

His hands grasp uselessly at the counter as George picks up the pace again. The sound of skin slapping against skin echoes obscenely through their kitchen, and Dream keeps on hearing these noises - high and whiny and desperate - before he realizes with a shock that they’re coming from *his* mouth. *Fucking hell*. He didn’t even know he *could* sound like that.

“Dream,” George gasps as he fucks into him, slower now, taking his time with each thrust, finding Dream’s prostate over and over again. How the fuck was George so good at this? How did he always know exactly what Dream wanted, how to make him feel like he was coming apart at the seams? These pieces of himself that George kept on uncovering - Dream hadn’t even been aware of their existence before now. It was like he was learning who he was all over again. For the first time, Dream got the sense, almost like he was looking at himself from a new vantage point, out of his own body, that the life he’d been living before had been one of disparate parts. Now that George was here with him like this, those parts had no separation at all. They flowed together easily. Dream had become water.

“You feel so fucking good, Dream,” George says, words slurring together as he smacks his hips forward. Dream gasps, his back arching. “So perfect, just for me.”

Dream’s cock is rigid and full, curved up against his stomach, so slick with pre-cum that it’s practically dripping, and he knows at that moment that he could cum from this alone, from the feeling of George inside of him. That would be more than enough to send him tumbling over the edge.

“I’m close,” Dream gasps, already knowing George is not far behind by how his thrusts are growing more sloppy, more frantic.

“Wait,” George demands, speeding up his pace further, until Dream can feel every thrust in the back of his throat. “Let me go first, alright? You’ll do that? Be good and let me cum in you?”

Dream whimpers, pressing his cheek against the counter, too overwhelmed to speak. Every drag of George’s cock leaves him hyper-sensitive, but he loves it, loves the faint mark of pain it leaves behind, loves how open he feels, how full.

“Wanna hear you say it,” George insists, reaching a hand up and carding it through Dream’s sweat-damp hair. “Come on, Dream, say it.”

“Cum in me, George, please,” Dream pleads, half-delirious with want. Almost unconsciously, he can feel himself clench, and George moans, low and loud. He’s gone a second later, and Dream can *feel* himself getting filled up as George cums, thrusts slowing as he rides out his orgasm. The sounds, the feeling of everything, of *George* finishing inside of him - it’s too much, and Dream’s own orgasm hits him like a train in the same breath, leaving him spurting up all over his stomach and the counter.

It’s like Dream has to sink back into his own body - that’s how intense it feels. Like he needs to remember how to be a person all over again, teach himself how to have thoughts other than *good* and *fuck* and *sex* and *George*. He feels entirely spent, like he could collapse at any second, and yet he also feels like he could run a marathon. Fight a dragon, maybe. He feels fucking *great*.

They stand there for a moment, breathing heavily, until George slowly begins to pull out. On shaky legs, Dream stands up straight, rolling his neck as he does. He catches George’s eye as he turns around, already grabbing for his sweatpants on the floor. Suddenly, it feels a lot weirder to be naked in here, especially considering that George barely even tugged down his own shorts.

“Did you -?” George asks, mouth parted.

“What?” Dream finishes tugging up his sweatpants, still adjusting to the sensation of how *wet* everything feels.

“You...I didn’t even touch you,” George says, gesturing to the general area of Dream’s crotch. Dream lets out a laugh at the crudeness of the gesture.

“I know,” he says. “I came anyway, though.”

George stares at him for another moment, mouth opening and closing. Then, he practically pounces on him, jumping into Dream’s arms and pressing their mouths together so forcefully Dream’s nose feels bruised. Dream yelps, wrapping his arms firmly around George’s waist as George continues kissing him; his mouth, his cheeks, his nose, his jawline.

“Fuck,” George mutters between kisses. “You are - so - *hot*.”

Dream laughs in disbelief. “I am?”

“Yes, *ugh*,” George groans, kissing down Dream’s neck. “So hot it’s literally annoying.”

“But - hey, hey,” Dream says, pulling back a bit, forcing George to detach his mouth from his skin. George looks at him, pouting slightly. “That was good, right?”

George’s expression goes through a rapid series of changes - from shock, to disbelief, straight into anger. Then, he takes Dream’s face in his hands and shakes him.

“Yes!” He exclaims. “Oh my God, you’re actually so dumb!”

Dream opens his mouth to speak, but George is apparently done talking. He tugs Dream back in, slotting their mouths back together again. Still holding George’s waist, Dream manages to guide them back over to the counter so George can sit down on top of it. They stay like that for a while, George’s arms thrown over his shoulders, Dream’s hands tangled in his hair, kissing like it’s the only thing they know how to do. It’s softer, slower, with a push and pull that Dream relishes, like they’re moving together, part of the same tide. George is loose limbed and happy, completely undeterred by the fact that Dream is still covered in cum and sweat-soaked. If anything, it only seems to make him more enthusiastic.

Their mouths make a small *pop* when they finally separate and George laughs at the sound, always overjoyed by the strangest noises. It makes Dream grin.

“I mean it. It was good,” George says sincerely. “Very, very good.”

Dream smiles, bumping their foreheads together, eyes going crossed at such a close proximity.

“Just good?” He prompts. George scoffs, whacking him lightly in the chest.

“Don’t push it,” he insists.

“It’s ok,” Dream says with a shrug. “I already know you think I’m perfect.”

George doesn’t deny it, just looks at him with that same, soft smile on his face. It makes Dream wanna do something insane. *Say something insane*, more specifically. He can feel it now, resting heavy on his tongue, like something that has crawled up from the deepest part of himself and could choke him if he’s not careful.

Careful. With something (*someone*) this important, he has to be careful.

“We, uh, we should clean up,” he points out, slowly untangling his hands from George’s hair and moving them down to rest on his thighs. (He’s actually become a big fan of the shorts, if he’s being honest. He should really ask George to wear them more often.)

George glances down at the counter, then back up at Dream, grinning.

“Imagine we just left it,” he says. Dream gapes at him but George just laughs. “Oh my God. That’d be epic.”

“*What?* Left it? George that is - that is so gross!” Dream exclaims. “This is our *kitchen*.”

“I know,” George says. “But it’d be like a prank.”

“A prank? I - *George!*” Dream shouts, which only makes George laugh harder. It’s so stupid, but Dream loves George’s laugh so much that it’s impossible not to get caught up in it too, and pretty soon they’re both falling over each other, made weak with laughter. When Dream finally gets a hold of himself, his cheeks are aching.

“I think,” he begins after a moment, “the French toast might be cold now.”

George glances over to the plate on the other side of the stove where their breakfast is resting.

“Hm, I don’t care,” he decides, turning back to Dream. “I’ll still eat it later.”

“Later?” Dream prompts, tilting his head. George grins, wrapping his hand firmly around the back of Dream’s neck.

“Later,” he says, and pulls him in again. Like the tide rushing back out to sea, Dream goes, and goes, and goes.

After that, George becomes a lot less shy. Not like he was all that shy in the first place, but still. While George never had any problem trying to get what he wanted, Dream still got the sense that, when it came to the two of them, there was a lot George hadn’t worked up the courage to ask for yet. But with each day, incrementally, he was getting better.

And it was gonna give Dream a fucking heart attack. Send him to an early grave, genuinely. Because the stuff George wanted - it took Dream by surprise, to say the least.

They’re lying in George’s bed a few days later, half-watching some show on his laptop. Dream has just showered after a workout, and his hair is leaving a damp halo on the pillow behind him, since he was far too lazy to dry it properly. George keeps on drifting in and out of sleep, curled up on Dream’s chest, but at this moment, he’s awake and playing absently with a loose thread in the hem of Dream’s t-shirt. Dream keeps on getting distracted from the show in front of them, even though it’d been his idea to watch it in the first place. He just finds it much more interesting to look at George’s face from this angle; the way his lashes splay out beneath the half-moon of his lidded eyes, the messy, sleep-mused fringe on his forehead.

On the screen in front of them, the episode ends and the credits finally begin to roll. A small button pops up in the lower right corner, indicating the next episode is about to begin, but before it can, George reaches forward and closes the laptop. The room is plunged into a warm darkness, the only light now coming from the lava lamp on George’s bedside table (one of the first things he bought

for himself in Florida) and the smattering of fairy lights strung across his wall (a decoration Dream insisted on.)

George turns to look up at Dream, a contemplative expression on his face.

“I think I wanna eat you out,” he says, as casual as if he’s telling Dream he’d like to go to the grocery store later. It takes a second for Dream’s brain to register exactly what he just said, but the moment he does, he’s sitting up straight, jostling George off of him.

“What?” He asks. George rolls his eyes, shifting his posture so he’s leaning on his elbow and looking Dream in the eye.

“I said,” he begins slowly. “I want to eat you out. Must I repeat myself?”

“Oh,” Dream says. They stay like that for a second, just looking at each other, before the corner of George’s lip twitches up, a gentle expression coming over his face. The hand that was occupied with the thread dips underneath the fabric of Dream’s t-shirt and settles on his stomach instead, warm and protective.

“I think you’d enjoy it,” George says.

Dream nods, still feeling dumbstruck by the whole idea.

“Have you...done it before?”

“A couple times,” George confirms. Dream does his best to react normally to his statement, but something in his expression must betray him, cause George is fixing him with a look a second later. “Forever ago. Back at uni.”

“Right.” Dream nods stiffly, trying to ignore the completely irrational, totally misplaced sting of jealousy curling in his throat. It’s not like either of them were virgins when they met, not by a long shot, and that isn’t something Dream even wanted in the first place. But the idea of George being with anyone other than him, the idea of someone else knowing George that intimately, making him feel good -

Dream cuts his thoughts short right there, biting down hard on the inside of his cheek. Normal. He’s trying to be normal.

George nods, casting his eyes down.

“Yeah, it’s a real shame,” he murmurs. “I’m pretty sure that guy was my soulmate.”

Dream gapes at him and George looks back up before breaking into a peal of evil, evil laughter.

“You are such a dick,” Dream practically shouts. “Oh my God!”

“You’re sexy when you’re jealous,” George says and ok, it’s difficult for Dream to hold back his blush at that.

“Shut up,” he mutters.

“You’d probably kill someone if they looked at me wrong, huh?” George prompts, leaning in closer. “If I asked you too?”

“You aren’t gonna ask me to kill anyone for you, George,” Dream says calmly, even as a very irrational, all too loud part of his brain immediately insists that *yes, yes without question*.

“Hm, I might,” George muses, the hand on Dream’s stomach beginning to dip lower at a glacial pace. It’s embarrassing how quickly Dream’s dick takes interest.

“You’re crazy,” Dream murmurs, craning his neck down, bringing their faces closer together. George’s focus flies to his lips immediately and Dream grins, bringing his hand up and placing two fingers underneath the curve of George’s chin.

“So are you,” George says, a challenging glint emerging in his eyes. “For me, you are.”

Dream isn’t gonna deny it. He’s a shit liar, anyway. Instead, he just tilts George’s chin up and kisses him, slow and thorough, just like how he knows George likes. George lets out a small gasp at the contact, then wastes no time in maneuvering himself onto Dream’s lap, never allowing their lips to part for more than a breath. Dream places his hands firmly on his waist, splaying his fingers out wide, trying to claim as much space as possible, which draws a swift shudder from George’s body. He opens his mouth further and George deepens the kiss, bringing a hand up to cup at Dream’s jaw.

George was insatiably curious when it came to Dream’s mouth. He seemed to want to map out every crevice of it, to explore it completely. Dream remembers kissing; he remembers passionate make out sessions and awkward pecks and the first time he tried to use tongue. But nothing, *nothing*, in his life came close to how it felt to kiss George. It was so much more than just kissing. It felt like he was being claimed.

George shifts in his lap and the sudden friction between them sends Dream’s blood tumbling downward. George notices the change immediately, like an animal sensing a storm, and he begins kissing his way down Dream’s jaw, marking him up as he goes.

“You - *ha*-” Dream gasps as George’s teeth find purchase in the soft flesh above his collarbone. “You gonna eat me?”

George laughs into his skin. He pulls back just slightly, tugging at the hem of Dream’s shirt until Dream gets the memo and swiftly pulls it off over his head. George grins, running his hands up and down the wide plain of Dream’s naked chest. Despite all the heat generated between them, George’s hands still leave him shivering.

“Uh-uh,” he confirms. He lowers his head, placing a kiss right at the center of Dream’s sternum. “Devour you.” Another kiss, lower this time. “Whole.”

George crawls down his body further, kissing down along his ribs, over his stomach, above his belly button. Dream lets out a small laugh, which he immediately knows is a mistake. The second George catches the sound, he starts kitten-licking the same spot, leaving Dream gasping.

“God - George!” He chastises. “Stop, stop, it tickles.”

“So sensitive,” George chides, looking up at him through his lashes. Dream stops short, unable to resist reaching a hand down to cup George’s cheek. He was just *so* -

“Beautiful,” Dream murmurs. George’s cheeks go a pleasant shade of pink and he props his chin up on Dream’s stomach, all big brown eyes and soft skin.

“Dream,” he says sweetly, fringe falling down over his eyes. “Turn over for me.”

Dream’s mouth opens of its own accord. Sometimes, George was so hot Dream thought it might actually kill him.

“You really like giving orders, huh?” Dream asks, doing his best to keep his tone even, despite how lightheaded he suddenly feels.

George nods, then begins trailing his kisses down lower, along the flaxen trail of hair leading to the waistband of Dream’s shorts. Dream exhales shakily, his arousal steadily growing.

“And you like listening to me,” George points out, keeping his voice light. He tugs at the shorts, and Dream lifts his hips, allowing George to tug them off and undress him completely.

“I do,” Dream admits, unashamed. George grins at that, finally taking off his own shirt and sweatpants and tossing them down into a pile on the floor.

“Don’t worry,” he says, settling back onto the bed beside Dream, already half-hard. *From kissing*, Dream’s brain points out, always so excitable. *From kissing me!*

George’s hand comes to stroke Dream’s chest again, almost like he’s petting him. “You can give the orders next time,” he finishes, the silkiness of his tone sending a shiver down Dream’s spine.

“Is that a promise?” Dream asks, propping himself up on his elbows. George seems to think for a moment, then leans down, pressing a chaste kiss to Dream’s lips.

“Depends on how good you are,” he murmurs. Dream grins. He always loved a challenge.

“I can be good,” he promises, dipping his voice lower, appreciating the way George’s breath hitches at the words.

“Ok,” George agrees, eyes gone dark with arousal. “Then show me.”

Dream rolls over onto his stomach without hesitation. This wasn’t something he’d ever considered before: how fucking turned on being obedient would make him feel. There was just something about leaving himself completely in George’s hands, trusting him entirely, that had Dream growing hard against the bedspread. Not to mention how much he appreciated the praise which, yeah, it didn’t take a genius to figure out he’d be into that one.

George starts gentle at first, kneading his ass and spreading him open further in a careful, measured way that strikes Dream as so typical, so *George*. The way George held things had always stood out to Dream. He seemed so hesitant sometimes, like a child who was handed something fragile and told not to break it. George, who picks up his desk knick-knacks and dusts them off one by one, who holds the seashell Dream brought home for him in the palm of his hand like it’s a precious gem, who treats Dream with the same level of tenderness that he treats everything he loves. How lucky Dream felt, to be one of George’s treasured things.

Then, he feels George’s breath ghost over his hole and Dream lets out a sudden, surprised moan, inadvertently pressing his hips down against the bed.

“Fuck,” George breathes and Dream can feel the words inside of him. “Gonna hump the bed for me, baby? Wanna get off while my tongue is inside of you?”

“Yes,” Dream chokes out. “Yes, George, please.”

“So dirty,” George murmurs, before he finally licks at Dream’s rim. Dream gasps, back arching, and George places a firm hand against his ass, holding him in place. “So *filthy*, Dream.”

George’s tongue is quick and teasing, like a cat toying with its prey, and Dream fucking falls apart underneath him, writhing and grinding down against the bed. George licks around him for a bit,

and Dream can feel tears spring up in his eyes, overwhelmed by pleasure, before George finally slides his tongue inside of him.

“Fuck, fuck,” Dream repeats senselessly, brain turned to mush in his skull. “*George.*”

George hums, and holy shit, that’s a new sensation. Dream finds himself pushing his hips back without even meaning to, seeking out more, more, more of that, and George responds eagerly, lapping at him and then thrusting his tongue in again, deeper this time. Devouring him.

“You taste good,” George says when he finally comes up for air. Dream lets out a whine, grinding down against the bed, his cock full and aching. He feels like a goddamn teenager again, rendered totally mindless by desire. Like no one’s ever touched him before.

“It’s so good George, feels so fucking good,” he babbles.

“I know,” George says, tone gone soothing, peppering kisses against the small of Dream’s back. This time, when George’s tongue enters him again, Dream fucks himself back onto it eagerly. George’s hands grab at his ass, so forceful Dream is sure bruises in the shape of his fingers will be left behind, and sets an enthusiastic pace, like he can’t get enough. The thought of that makes Dream’s cock twitch against the bed, and he moans, loving the idea that George is enjoying this just as much as he is.

“That’s it,” George says, breathless and cloying. “Good boy, Dream. Come on, show me how bad you want it.”

Dream groans, rutting against the bed desperately. His blood is running so hot he feels liquified, and when George licks into him again, his leg actually *spasms*, some strange, primal reaction that leaves him shaking.

“Shit,” Dream swears, voice coming out in a half-sob. “I’m so close, George.”

George doesn’t pull away this time, clearly absorbed with the task at hand. They find a rhythm together; George thrusting into him with his tongue, Dream grinding down against the bed, and soon Dream can feel the taught spring of his orgasm tighten inside of him. He spares a glance back to find George tugging at his own cock, clumsily smearing pre-cum down his shaft, and that’s what finally makes him snap, the sight of George getting off to this, getting off to his tongue inside of Dream. He releases all over the bed, bucking his hips up, the force of it leaving him gasping. Behind him, he hears George moan, and a moment later, he pulls away and Dream can feel the sudden, spurting warmth of George’s cum being painted across his back.

George collapses beside him, panting hard. Dream turns to face him, lying flat on his stomach with his cheek pressed against the pillow. George looks utterly disheveled, and Dream is sure he doesn’t look much better himself, considering what a mess they just made of each other. It’s a truly beautiful sight, to see George’s pushed up fringe, the blotchy color settling on his cheeks. To see how wrecked he is over, because of, Dream.

“Holy shit,” George says, eyes huge and fixed to the ceiling.

“Hnghngh,” Dream replies. And then, a second later, when real words actually return to him, “I mean. Yeah. Holy shit.”

George’s eyes slide over to meet Dream’s and he smiles, lips pink and swollen. Dream really, *really* wants to kiss him.

“Told you you’d enjoy it,” he says triumphantly. “Enjoy” honestly felt like a bit of an

understatement. Like, Dream “enjoyed” walks. They didn’t permanently alter the trajectory of his life.

George stretches his arms up over his head, letting out a exaggerated yawn. Always so sleepy after sex, to the point where sometimes Dream had to all but carry him to the shower. It’s honestly pretty endearing.

“Hey,” Dream murmurs, reaching out and brushing his knuckles against George’s cheek. George nuzzles into the touch automatically, which makes Dream’s heart sing. “You took really good care of me.”

The smile on George’s face deepens. “I did?”

“Yeah,” Dream confirms. He leans over and kisses George, is greeted with the heady taste of himself on George’s lips, and only presses his tongue in further, completely undeterred. This time, George allows himself to be kissed, allows Dream to delve into his mouth and take him apart. It’s slow and warm and wet and when Dream pulls away, George looks up at him with a dazed expression on his face.

“You know,” he begins quietly, suddenly sounding much less sure of himself. “What I said about the other guy. I was kidding.”

Dream scoffs. “I know, George. You just like getting me riled up.”

“No, but,” George presses on, and Dream is surprised when he reaches a hand up and cups his cheek. “Sometimes I feel like...like everything I did before this, every other person...it was all just practice.”

Dream stares at him, struck down completely by the implications of his words.

“Then what does that make this?” He asks, voice wavering. George blinks, once, then again, his eyes going damp in the low light of the room.

“The real thing.”

Dream feels his chest go hollow. The lamp on the bedside table pulses, casts George in an eerie, blue light, like he’s on the other side of a pane of glass. When Dream leans down to kiss him this time, George’s cheeks are damp.

“It’s real,” Dream whispers against his lips, tasting salt. “It’s real for me too.”

What Dream doesn’t say is that, sometimes, in moments like this, George felt like the only real thing in the whole world. The way Dream loved him was like a ceiling. Everything Dream was existed underneath it.

George runs a hand through his hair, threads his fingers in, and holds Dream. He holds him when they rinse off together, arms wrapped loosely around his midriff, allowing Dream to shampoo his hair. He holds him when they fall back into bed after they dry off, strung out and tangled together, smelling like the same soap. Holds him when Dream finally turns off all the lights and plunges them down into darkness.

George is asleep in seconds, curled up on Dream’s chest, cheek pressed to the skin above his heart. Dream can’t tell what time it is. Pressed up against each other, cocooned in the artificial cool of George’s AC, it feels like they are floating somewhere on a very small island, separate from the rest of the world, with nothing but the vast sky above them. Dream falls asleep to the sound of

George's even breathing and dreams of the moon.

Sapnap requested Takis, the blue kind, but they're all out, so Dream is texting him now, standing in the middle of the snack aisle, wondering if regular Takis taste the same or if there really is something different about the blue ones. He's about to just say fuck it and buy the regular kind when his phone buzzes in his pocket. He tugs it out to find a text from Sapnap waiting for him:

get hot cheetos instead

Dream rolls his eyes, thumbing a quick response:

fine

Another buzz as his screen lights up again.

and sour patch kids too :)

He scoffs, shoving his phone back into his pocket. Obviously he's gonna get the Sour Patch Kids too, but Sapnap doesn't need to know that. Dream can make him sweat a little.

He doesn't have a cart or anything, so he just grabs the Cheetos and holds them in his hand along with the two lemonades, before continuing down the aisle in search of candy. Up here, he can see George perched by the register, sunglasses pushing his fringe back from his forehead. Dream pauses near the gummy bears, a soft smile on his face, as he watches George talk to the girl behind the counter. She can't be much older than 17, but Dream gets the sense that she's not a fan. Fans had a very different way of approaching George. Usually with tears in their eyes. Frankly, Dream can't blame them for that one. Seeing George in person was pretty overwhelming.

In theory, he and George were supposed to be doing driving practice, but after about an hour of messing around in an empty parking lot, George declared he was bored of the whole thing and that he thought they should get snacks instead. Dream's heart needed a break from the anxiety of being in the car with George while he tried to parallel park, so he agreed, and drove them to the nearest convenience store.

Of course, Dream made the mistake of telling Sapnap what they were doing when he texted asking them where they were, which is why Dream is now carrying a family sized bag of Sour Patch Kids, along with the Cheetos, up to the register beside George.

"-never been out of the state," Dream hears the girl saying once he's within earshot. "But, y'know, I figure if not now then when, right?"

"Right," George says, nodding attentively. Dream's smile deepens and he sets the two lemonades down, prompting George to look over at him. He's already got his own selection placed on the counter; a bag of honey mustard pretzels and some sour gummy worms.

"Will that be all?" The girl asks, looking over at Dream. No recognition passes over her face, confirming his earlier suspicion.

"Yup," he says, reaching into his pocket to grab his wallet.

"Olive, was it?" George questions. The girl nods, grabbing a lemonade and passing it under the scanner. "Olive is going to university in London."

“Oh, cool,” Dream says, offering a smile.

“Yeah, probably embarrassing to start talking about it to a random person just cause they have a British accent, but in my defense, we don’t get a lot visitors in here,” Olive says sheepishly. George smiles.

“I actually live here now,” he says, and Dream can hear in his voice just how much he loves saying that. He has to actively resist the urge to swoop down and kiss George right there.

Olive raises an eyebrow. “You moved from London to Orlando?”

George nods, and she shakes her head, laughing slightly.

“Why?”

“Uh...” George shuffles on his feet, glancing at Dream out of the corner of his eye. “This is just... where I wanted to be.”

Olive’s eyes widen and she looks between them for a moment before a smile settles on her face. Dream feels the tips of his ear go hot.

“Well, I hope you like the heat,” Olive finally says.

“And I hope you like the rain,” George replies. “Like, *really* like it.”

“What, you weren’t a fan?” She asks teasingly. George hesitates for a moment. For some reason, he doesn’t look at Dream at all this time.

“No,” he says quietly. “Honestly, it made me kinda sad.”

Olive nods, placing their food into a plastic bag. George clears his throat, finally looking over at Dream again.

“Either way,” he says. “I like it here much more.”

Instinctually, Dream goes to reach for his hand, but stops short, leaving it suspended awkwardly between them. Is he supposed to do stuff like that? Is that too far, holding George’s hand in public? Too intimate? It feels like such a dumb thing to stress over, considering all the other stuff they’ve done, but even so, the innocent gesture makes him freeze. He just doesn’t want to make George uncomfortable. Doesn’t want to do anything that would make him wanna pull away.

George looks down at his hand, then back up at Dream’s face. Something crosses his expression, but it’s gone in a second, and he’s smiling at Olive again, accepting the bag when she hands it over.

“Good luck at school,” he says, already turning around and heading for the exit. Dream stares at his back for a moment, watching as he disappears through the sliding doors, back outside into the damp heat of the afternoon. Then, he turns around, nodding at Olive in thanks, and goes to follow.

When Dream catches up to him in the parking lot, any trace of weirdness seems to have vanished, and George is grinning at him, poised by the driver’s side door.

“George...” Dream cautions as he approaches, already knowing exactly what’s going through his head.

“Oh, come on!” George exclaims. “I’m bored of parking lots, Dream. They’re dumb and they suck and I hate them.”

“Ok, but practice is important,” Dream insists. “Look, we can go back to the parking lot and then in like, two hours, *maybe*, you can go on a real road, cause that way you’ll be used to...”

Dream trails off, letting out a sigh at the expectant expression on George’s face. Slowly, George extends his free hand over the roof of the car. Dream stares at him.

“*Dreeeam*,” George says, waggling his eyebrows.

“George,” Dream replies flatly.

The stalemate lasts for approximately three more seconds. Dream groans, shoving his hand down into his pocket, searching for the keys. George lets out an excited squeal and, despite his best interests, Dream can’t help but smile at the sound. He tosses the keys over the car, half-expecting to catch George off guard, but George catches them easily in his hand.

“I’m picking the music too,” he says.

“Ok, that’s not fair,” Dream insists, sliding down into the passenger seat. “When I die I at least wanna be listening to a song I like.”

George glares at him as he buckles in. Dream sticks his tongue out and lets George have the aux anyway.

Despite Dream’s initial fears, George is surprisingly calm behind the wheel. Once he’s gotten them out of the parking lot and back onto the main road, he ends up driving them out past the strip malls and fast food restaurants. Eventually, they up reaching a state route that’s surrounded by long, narrow rows of palm trees on either side. Dream has one hand splayed out possessively over George’s thigh, watching out the windshield as the sky begins to steadily darken overhead. The air has been thick all day, leaving Dream’s skin feeling sticky and tight, and now, the further out they get, the more he can see the clear signs of an approaching storm.

George’s fingers drum on the steering wheel, not seeming to keep tempo with anything in particular. Dream keeps on looking at him out of the corner of his eye, a mirror image of the first time they were in a car together. It’s still just as hard as ever to tear his gaze away. Sometimes, George will glance over and meet his eyes, and Dream will smile at him, heart like a bird in his throat, that fluttering anxiety rendering him mute. George keeps the music low, but he sings along anyway, clearly enjoying himself, and in that moment, Dream loves him so much it’s difficult to think of anything else. Difficult to *breathe*.

Then, George sighs loudly, startling him. Dream must’ve lost track of time completely, because when he looks around he realizes he has no idea where the fuck they are.

“Ok,” George says. “I’m tired.”

Dream lets out a laugh. Typical.

“Well, that’s the thing about driving George, you can’t just give up in the middle of the road,” Dream explains, which earns him an eye-roll.

“Well, in the UK, we take breaks,” George says. “We don’t just drive for hours and hours on end

until we can't anymore."

"First of all, it's been like, an hour max," Dream points out. "But whatever, point taken. We can switch."

He scans the road for a moment. Luckily, it's quiet, only a few other cars passing in the opposite lane, and it doesn't take long for Dream to spot a sign for a rest area up ahead.

"Ok, uh, turn right up there," Dream says, motioning towards a small turn-off just a few more miles up the road. On his approach, George gradually slows the car and guides them into the small lot. It's no more than a patch of dirt by a marsh, shaded by a large crop of trees. Over by the entrance, Dream spots a sign: Wetlands Sanctuary. It's small, seemingly too small to give an official title to, but all the same - it's clear the land has been marked off for something. George turns the key, and the car goes quiet, music replaced with the dull hum of nature outside the window. Dream glances out the windshield, craning his neck up slightly.

"There must be a protected species here or something," he murmurs. "Like a snake or turtle, maybe. Do you think -?"

Dream stops himself, surprised by the small metallic sound of George unbuckling his seatbelt. He turns to look at him, but before he can say anything, George is lifting himself easily across the center console and, in one fluid motion, positioning himself in Dream's lap, his legs straddling either side of Dream's thighs. Dream looks up at him, mouth still open around words he hasn't said.

"Hi," George greets casually. Dream stares up at him.

"Hi," he echoes. "Do you, uh, come to this Wetlands Sanctuary often?"

George raises an eyebrow. "*Wet*-lands?"

Dream's expression flattens and George lets out a laugh, clearly pleased with himself.

"You were saying something about an endangered snake, or whatever?" He prompts. Dream nods numbly.

"Uh, well technically most reptiles in Florida are considered protected, not endangered. There's a difference."

"Is that so?" George asks, parting his mouth in a small *O*. Dream fixes him with a stern look. "No, really Dream. I'm very interested in these reptiles and the things they've done that warrant protection. Please, go on."

"You're funny," Dream deadpans.

"I am," George agrees easily, as if the compliment was paid in earnest. Dream opens his mouth to respond, but in the same moment, George brings a hand up and lets his fingers tangle in the short hair at the base of Dream's skull, just above his neck. His nails scratch lightly against Dream's skin, making small, hypnotizing circles. "I do think, though, that they are more interesting things we could do than talk about reptiles."

"Oh, like what?" Dream asks, a grin stretching across his face. "I think wildlife is pretty interesting, George."

George rolls his eyes. "Yes, so very interesting. Wow, a stupid snake is here sometimes and then

other times it isn't but we need to make sure we're all ready in case it does ever decide to show it's ugly face around here again. Fascinating."

"That's cruel, George, I thought you were an animal lover," Dream says, puffing his lips out in a slight pout. George scoffs at the sight.

"Yes, and I love my grandma as well, but I don't feel the need to have a full conversation about her right at this exact moment. Understood?"

Dream laughs, shaking his head in disbelief. George's hand moves with him easily, his fingers never straying from their position. Dream's starting to get the sense that George has a real thing for his hair. Maybe he should ask him about that.

"So, if you don't wanna talk," Dream says, titling his head up and bringing their faces closer together. "What do you wanna do?"

"You're a smart boy, Dream," George says, his voice smooth. "Figure it out."

Dream hums contemplatively, slowly bringing his hands up and pushing them underneath the thin fabric of George's t-shirt. George lets out a breath, and Dream grins, spreading his fingers out wide, always loving just how much of George he's able to hold.

"I don't know, George," he says, frowning. "You're so hard to read sometimes. So *mysterious*."

"I am," George agrees easily. "Very cool, also."

Dream glides his hands up George's stomach, along his ribs, towards the smooth expanse of his chest. George's eyes never leave his face, but Dream can feel his fingers tremble against his skull, the smallest sign of his composure breaking. Dream smiles, bringing his head down, speaking into the skin of George's neck.

"So cool," he agrees, pressing a soft kiss beneath George's ear. Another breath, more ragged this time. Slowly but surely, George is fraying at the edges. Dream's hands come to rest against his shoulder blades, keeping him in place, a warm anchor. "But I'm gonna need some help here, Georgie. What is it you want, exactly?"

"Oh, shut *up*," George insists, his tone short. Still - Dream can hear it, in the spaces between words. The breathless quality George's voice has begun to take on, as if all the air is being steadily rung out of him. Dream presses another kiss against his neck, lower now, closer to his collarbone. This time, there's so mistaking the sigh that passes George's lips. Dream smiles against his skin.

"Come on, George," he urges. "Use your words."

"There are plenty of words I could use here," George retorts, always obstinate, never willing to let Dream get the upper-hand. "Annoying comes to mind. Idiot does too."

"Uh huh," Dream says, a small smile crossing his lips. "Keep going."

"Dumb," George continues. Dream brings his mouth down and begins sucking at the soft slope between George's neck and shoulder, where his flesh forms a small valley. George gasps, his fingers tightening in Dream's hair. "Stupid."

"Hm," Dream hums, placing a kiss over the quickly forming bruise before moving to the other side. George wordlessly adjusts his posture, titling his head and granting Dream better access.

“Annoying,” George breathes when Dream’s lips meet his skin again, this time with the smallest scrape of teeth.

“You said that one already,” Dream reminds, pulling back just slightly.

“Yes, well, it’s true,” George says, still clinging to coherency despite Dream’s best efforts. It’s very frustrating. Dream is gonna have to come up with some more effective tactics. “So it bears repeating.”

This time, when Dream descends, he properly sinks his teeth in, intent on leaving mark. George arches back, all the breath leaving his body in an urgent gasp. *There we go.*

“You can keep going if you want,” Dream says, lifting his mouth and placing soft, tender kisses against the marred skin, down towards his shoulder, against the collar of his shirt. “I wanna hear all the things you’re gonna call me.”

George brings his other hand up, bunching in the fabric of Dream’s sweatshirt, tugging his closer.

“*Dream,*” he gasps.

All composure is lost. Dream presses up against him, bringing their lips together in a searing kiss. George responds immediately. The hand that was placed so tenderly against the base of Dream’s skull turns insistent, demanding, forcing them impossibly closer. Dream feels as if he’s being consumed, or maybe he’s the one doing the consuming, it’s impossible to tell. George’s mouth is open and pliant, but forceful, almost bruising, giving and taking in equal measure. It’s different this time. Almost frantic. And Dream *wants* it, he wants it more and more every single time, wants to be eaten alive, wants to be able to press his hands and teeth and tongue further and further in until there’s no separation anymore, until the boundaries between them have disappeared.

“Take this off,” George says when he pulls back, tugging at Dream’s sweatshirt. He sounds completely wrecked, and looks the part too, his face bright red and splotchy. It’s such a beautiful sight, Dream sort of wants to cry. *Jesus.* He was done for.

“Now!” George insists, grabbing at the fabric as if it’s done some great personal offense to him.

Dream nods, detaching his hands from George’s skin and shucking his sweatshirt off, trying to keep the space in which they aren’t touching as short as possible. In the small pause, George removes his shirt as well, and the second Dream gets himself situated again, he’s pulled back in for another kiss, slower this time, more languid. Time goes elastic. Hours could pass like this, and Dream would be none the wiser.

George shifts his position again, until his leg is pressed in between Dream’s and he’s seated right on his thigh. Dream spares a grateful thought for the absurd size of his car, the fact that they can both sit comfortably in the same seat and do this. Then, George grinds his hips forward, and Dream’s brain promptly empties of all thoughts entirely.

George’s tongue slides wetly over his own and he lets out a moan, moving his hips again, arousal swiftly growing against Dream’s leg, straining the front of his shorts.

“*Dream,*” he whines when Dream pulls away.

“Shh,” Dream soothes, pressing a kiss to his cheekbone, his jaw. “Tell me what you want.”

“I - *ugh,*” George groans, burning his face in Dream’s neck. Dream smirks, and the time, when George goes to move his hips forward, Dream places a large hand on either side of them, keeping

him still. George whines again and Dream's ears practically perk up at the sound. He knew George liked being manhandled, but he tries for an experiment anyway, digging his thumbs in hard to the dip above George's pelvis. George gasps, spit dampening Dream's skin.

"You like that?" Dream asks, turning his head and speaking into George's hair. "You want me to be rough with you?"

There's a moment of stillness, both of them breathing ragged and fast. Then, George nods.

"Can you say it for me, baby?" Dream prompts. "Please?"

For incentive, Dream trails his hands lower, down to George's ass, and squeezes hard. George moans at the contact.

"Yes, yes," he gasps, hips jumping forward seemingly of their own accord. "Yes, Dream, *please*."

This time, Dream allows George to grind against him, keeping one hand firmly placed on his ass and trailing the other through his hair. He can feel George's arousal thick and warm against his hip, his own cock swiftly growing in his shorts. George keeps his face hidden, but that honestly feels like cheating, so Dream takes the hand in his hair and *yanks*, tugging his head back. George parts his lips, another whine escaping from the back of his throat when he meets Dream's eyes.

"Wanna look at you while you ride my thigh," Dream murmurs. "Wanna see your face?"

"Fuck, Dream," George swears, screwing his eyes shut. It's fucking intoxicating, seeing George in this state, totally blissed out and chasing pleasure, getting off on Dream's thigh and hands and nothing else. It's such a rush of power that Dream feels dizzy with it, but there's something much stronger underneath that, something softer, that makes him wanna lean forward and capture George's lips again, swallowing down every delicious sound he makes.

"So fucking hot, baby," Dream says into George's open mouth, breathing him in. "Look so sexy, getting off on me like that."

"Dream," George pleads, eyes still shut, cheeks flushed to a feverish tint.

"Wanna ruin you," Dream says, pulling George's head back again. "Can you cum in your pants, baby? Get all dirty for me?"

"Fuck, fuck," George repeats, nodding hurriedly. "I can, I will, Dream, I will."

Dream fucking loves him. He fucking *loves* him, loves him like this, loves him in every way, *wants* him in every way, wants nothing else but this, could live on it until he dies, the rest of the world be damned. When the thought hits him, it doesn't feel like something new. It feels familiar; as easy as recalling his own name. It had already been a part of him this whole time.

George leans in to kiss him again, and Dream finally loosens his grip, bringing his hand down instead to palm himself through his pants, to give himself some much needed relief. George notices immediately and smacks his hand away in a second, reaching down beneath the waistband of Dream's shorts and cupping his dick. Dream lets his head fall back, the feeling of George's fingers wrapped around his cock making his brain go static.

George licks a stripe up his throat, thumbing at Dream's slit and collecting the pre-cum gathering there, using it to slick his grasp as he begins to jack him off. Dream slips his own hands underneath the fabric of George's shorts and kneads at his ass, fingers boring into the pillowy flesh.

“You are obsessed,” George says through ragged breaths, “with my ass.”

Dream chuckles, giving an affirmative squeeze.

“I’m obsessed with *you*,” he clarifies. Dream expects to receive some sort of quip in response, but instead George just buries his face in Dream’s neck again, letting out a soft, pleased sound. Encouraged, Dream decides to let his filter drop, words flowing naturally. “So fucking obsessed with you, George, ’s all I think about.”

“Yeah?” George prompts, grinding down against Dream’s thigh eagerly.

“*Shit*, yes,” Dream breathes. “You make me so crazy. It’s just you, it’s - no one else, George, no one else makes me feel like you do. It’s only you.”

“Fuck,” George sobs. “I’m close, Dream, I’m gonna-”

“Please, George, come on, I wanna make you feel good, that’s all I wanna do,” Dream continues, unable to stop himself now that’s he’s started. George’s hand moves up and down his cock, the friction making Dream’s whole body feel hypersensitive, a live-wire set to spark. “I - I *need* you, George, need you so fucking bad-”

“*Dream*,” George gasps, his whole body shuddering with the force of his orgasm. He stays glued to Dream’s thigh, hand still working his cock even as the rest of his body goes slack. Dream isn’t far behind, all the energy cresting inside of him with an almost destructive intensity.

“So beautiful George, the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” he says, words flowing without inhibition. “So beautiful when you cum for me, I could watch you forever - I want, I *want* you forever, George, I-”

George twists his wrist, finally bringing Dream to the edge of his climax, and he’s gone, spilling all over George’s hand. It all builds up to this, the final push, the last breath of resistance as all his walls finally shatter and Dream can hear himself say -

“I love you, I love you George.” He takes a shaky breath, feeling the pinprick of tears emerge behind his eyes. “I love you so much.”

The silence that follows settles in the car around them like a thick fog. Slowly, George’s grip loosens. They stay there like that, foreheads pressed together, breathing in sync.

“I-” George begins, voice catching in his throat. He brings his other hand up, places it against Dream’s chest. His skin is so hot Dream is sure a mark will be left behind. “I know, Dream. I know.”

The hand snakes up, across Dream’s chest, around his shoulder, tugging Dream in close, until Dream realizes that George is hugging him. Slowly, Dream wraps his own arms around George’s waist, burying his nose in his hair, and pretends he does not feel the way George’s chest shakes.

Against the window, fat raindrops begin to fall. The world outside goes muffled and grey. Further out, in a part of the world they can’t see, the estuary makes lazy rotations, carrying silt and water, further and further out still, past the thick growth of marsh grass, past the border of the earth, all the way to the sea.

Dream drives them straight through the storm, after they’ve done the best they can to clean up with

the small assortment of napkins and mini hand sanitizers in the glove compartment. George refuses to let there be even a moment of silence. He keeps the radio loud, and every time there's the smallest lull in music, he's talking, starting and stopping on random topics and letting the ends of his sentences dangle unfinished in the air between them. At one point he legitimately starts in on the *weather*, saying something about how they "needed this rain."

Dream keeps his eyes trained on the road ahead and tries very, very hard not to panic.

When they do eventually get home, they drop the snacks off in the kitchen without a word. Suddenly, George doesn't seem very inclined to speak at all. Dream trails up the stairs behind him, watching his back the whole time, wondering if it's possible to simply will himself back in time, so he can give his past self a swift slap across the face. It wasn't like he hadn't fucked up in regards to George before. They'd gotten in awful fights, screaming matches that left both of them raw and furious, sometimes to the point where they didn't speak to each other for days. But they always, *always* came back to each other. Always. That's just how they were. No matter how bad things got, it would always be the two of them back together in the end.

But *this*. This feels different.

When they reach the threshold of the hallway, George finally does turn around. Dream stands there, frozen on the spot. Then, George does the worst thing imaginable.

He smiles at him.

Not a real smile. A tight, close-lipped one that doesn't reach his eyes. It sends Dream's heart plummeting three stories down into the basement.

"I'm gonna shower," George says, his voice betraying nothing. The best Dream can do is bring himself to nod. George stays there for another moment, just looking at him, and then, body twisting like a blade, he turns around.

Dream doesn't run after him. Just watches him disappear down that long, long hallway, until he hears the telltale sound of a door shutting and a lock being turned.

It's a solid three hours later when Dream finally comes to the conclusion that there are no direct flights out of Orlando to London that night, which is good, because he figures that buys him at least 24 hours to figure out how to either a) invent time travel or b) find some way to magically erase George's memory. It's only when he finally closes out of the airline website that he realizes that, maybe, he's overreacting a bit. George isn't gonna pack his bags and leave in the dead of night. He deserves a hell of a lot more credit than that, especially considering all the work he put in to actually get here in the first place. Dream sags back in his desk chair, rubbing his hands firmly over his face.

Back behind him, on his bed, Patches lets out a discontented mowl. He spins around, unsurprised to find her perched on the edge of his bed, clearly displeased with the lack of attention she is currently receiving. Dream reaches out, scooping her up into his arms and pressing his nose into her fur. Immediately, he feels the purring begin to reverberate through her small body.

"What the hell am I gonna do?" He asks, embarrassed even in the emptiness of his room by the way his voice shakes. Patches bats lightly at his shoulder and doesn't say a word.

If Dream could count his greatest fears in life, he's pretty sure they'd fit on one hand. Horror

movies. Heights, particularly on rollercoasters. Disappointing people. Disappointing his fans. But above all that, at the very top of his list, was losing George.

Dream knows George feels the same, even though his fears always seem to have a more macabre bent to them. He remembers, not long before George's visa interview was confirmed, George telling him about these weird ideas he'd get in his head, about one of them getting in a horrible accident right before they finally got to meet. He'd get hit by a bus while trying to cross the street, or Dream would get struck by lightning, and boom, just like that, it'd all be over. George always laughed when he told these stories, but Dream understood that, somewhere underneath all that, was the very real fear that, despite all their time spent waiting and agonizing and *hoping*, it still wouldn't work out for them in the end.

Except, in all of Dream's worst nightmares, it was never some freak accident that drove them apart. No plane crashes, no sudden wild animal attacks. It was always just...him. Dream would fuck up. Dream would say something stupid, or make a mistake that couldn't be remedied, and just like that, George would pull away and everything between them, everything they were, would disappear.

It wasn't a fear he ever voiced out loud. It wasn't one he even liked to think about. That's how much it scared him; he didn't even wanna let the idea of it live in his brain.

And yet, now, here he is, living in the wake of it. He went too far, too soon. He misread what was happening between them, let his emotions run away with him, and now, he just has to wait to see how George will react. Maybe he'll pity Dream, treat him like some poor, kicked puppy and try to make him feel better. Maybe he'll pretend nothing happened at all, leave Dream to suffer in silence, unwilling to confront him directly.

Or maybe, he'll pull away. The thought of that makes Dream's stomach roil, bile rising hot and acidic in the back of his throat. Because, and this was the worst thing of all, Dream doesn't regret what he said at all. He meant every single word. And if George sees that, sees Dream's heart, and turns away? Dream doesn't think he'll be able to survive.

Dream lets his head fall back, eyes drifting up towards the small smattering of glow in the dark stars taped to his ceiling. Sometimes, Dream felt like he spent his whole life oscillating between two opposite poles. He was either terrified, isolating from the world, or running into it headfirst, consequences be damned. He'd never been able to find a middle ground. It was impossible for him to guard his heart. He either had to hide it away entirely, or take it in his hands, let the world see him bloody, and hope to God no one would put a knife through it.

And here is George, waiting with the knife. And here is Dream, willing to be struck through.

In his arms, Patches wiggles around, pulling Dream out of his thoughts. Her eyes are huge, scanning the dimly lit room like she's searching for something. He frowns, allowing her to jump down onto the ground. She heads straight for the door, sniffing underneath it. Dream straightens up in his chair, finally realizing what she's so intently focused on.

Something is burning.

Dream takes the stairs three at a time, nearly eating shit on the first floor. When he rounds the corner to the kitchen, he hears a screech, and then, just as he steps into the room -

"SHIT! FUCK!" George shouts, jumping away from the stove. He immediately sticks his finger into his mouth, sucking on it. Dream is next to him in a second, grabbing his other hand without a second thought.

“Are you ok?”

“I’m fine, FUCK!” George swears around his finger. He removes it, eyes widening as he finally seems to register that Dream is there in the room with him. “You aren’t supposed to be here!”

“Oh,” Dream says, dropping his hand and backing away. “I’m sorry, I just-”

He stops, finally thinking to turn and see what George actually burnt himself on. Their cast iron skillet is set on the stovetop and there’s a steak cooking inside it. Or, what looks like it used to be a steak. Now, it’s sort of a charred, round rock, sizzling with oil.

“Are you...cooking steak?” Dream asks, turning back to George. George looks at him, then back at the pan. He crosses his arms over his chest, closing himself off before finally meeting Dream’s eyes again.

“It was supposed to be a surprise,” he murmurs.

Dream’s eyes widen. George sniffs sharply, gaze suddenly darting to the ground, but even then, Dream can see his lip quiver.

“George are you...?” He stops himself, feeling his throat go tight. “Are you cooking dinner for me?”

George’s eyes fly up to his face. His jaw stays tense, almost like he’s angry, and then, finally, he nods.

“Yes, ok, but I know how to make steak,” he begins hurriedly. “I’ve cooked steak before, alright? But the oil got too hot, and I kept on trying to cut the potatoes too, and I don’t know how the fuck to turn the oven on, cause this kitchen is so huge and confusing, and then when I looked back it was burning, and when I tried to turn it over the oil jumped on me, like it literally *attacked me*, Dream, and I-”

He stops himself short, abruptly running out of steam. Dream doesn’t say a word. Instead, he takes a few steps closer, re-entering George’s orbit. George doesn’t move away. With an exhale, he lets his arms drop.

“You’re always cooking for me, so I just thought...I don’t know. I thought it’d be nice,” he mutters. “Now it’s all...burnt.”

Dream’s eyes never leave his face. When he reaches down, George opens his hand and allows their fingers to interlock. Dream can feel all his fears melt away in one, glorious breath.

“Ok,” he says. “I’ll eat it anyway.”

George frowns. “No, you won’t.”

“I will,” Dream insists. “And it’ll taste... *so* disgusting.”

The corner of George’s lip twitches up into the beginnings of a smile, the first break of sunlight through the clouds. Dream grins back in full force, before his brain finally catches up with him and reminds him what he just spent the last three hours agonizing over. He steps closer still, looking down at their interlocking hands.

“What I said, in the car-” he starts.

"Dream," George begins quietly.

"Please, just," Dream looks back up at him, expression pleading. "I...I meant it, George, I did. But I don't wanna do anything to, to push you away, or make you leave-"

"Jesus, Dream!" George interrupts. "*Leave?* Are you crazy? I wouldn't - I would *never*..."

He trails off, eyes searching Dream's face.

"I just...I got scared," he confesses.

"Scared?" Dream echoes. "Of...of me?"

"No, no of course not," George says, shaking his head. "I..."

He stops himself again, taking a deep breath.

"It scares the shit out of me, Dream. How much I love you," George says, his voice breaking around the words. "Sometimes I think I was born for it."

George looks away, blinking sharply. For a moment, Dream can do nothing but stand there and watch him. He tries to take stock of everything; the way George's hand feels in his, small and warm, the way he looks in his oversized t-shirt, draping off his shoulders. The smell of oil. The sound of rain.

"George," Dream says, breaking the fragile silence again. "I was always gonna fall in love with you."

He reaches up with his other hand now, taking George's face and gently turning it back towards him. When George looks up at him, his eyes have gone glassy with tears.

"It was always gonna be you," Dream says, feeling his own eyes begin to well up. "And I know - I *know* it took me a while, ok? I know I was a fucking idiot sometimes, I know I said things and - and I did things that might've made you think different but, George, you gotta believe me. It was *always* going to be you."

Dream exhales shakily, a small smile breaking out over his face.

"And I don't want you to be scared because...I love you *so much*," he says, letting out a quiet laugh. "God, George. I love you so fucking much."

At the sight of his laughter, a smile emerges on George's face as well, and soon he's laughing too, bright and disbelieving, tears still streaming down his cheeks.

"I love you," Dream repeats again, amazed by how good it feels to say those words. "I love you, George, I love you."

"I love you too," George says, voice bubbling with laughter. "I love you, Dream."

Dream swoops down, wrapping his arms firmly around George's waist and bringing him in for a tight embrace. George lets out a yelp, but that swiftly dissolves into more laughter, and he's reaching up and hugging Dream back.

"I love you," Dream says again, just because he can. George tucks his head into the crook of Dream's shoulder.

“Say it again,” he murmurs.

“I love you,” Dream repeats. “I love you, George.”

George pulls his head back to meet Dream’s gaze. Then, he cranes his neck up, placing a soft kiss on Dream’s cheek. It turns Dream’s heart to putty in his chest.

“You love me,” George says, like he can hardly believe it.

Dream grins. “I do. And you love me.”

George hums, tapping his chin and making a big show out of pretending to think about it.

“Hm, I suppose I do,” he finally says.

“I’ll take it,” Dream says, and lifts him up off the ground.

“Oh my God - *Dream!*” George shouts, tightening his grip as Dream spins him around. When he finally settles, George places his hands firmly on his shoulders, looking down at him. “One of these days you’re gonna drop me.”

“Literally impossible,” Dream insists, shaking his head. “Never gonna happen.”

George rolls his eyes, but a moment later, he’s leaning down into Dream’s space and pressing their lips together. It feels like Dream can properly breathe again. He smiles into the kiss, content to let this go on forever, but after a moment, his nose begins to itch.

“George,” he murmurs, pulling away.

“What?” George groans, clearly frustrated by the break in contact.

“I think your steak is burning again,” Dream says, glancing over to the stove. George turns his head to look, an expression of defeat crossing his features.

“Ok,” he begins, turning back to Dream. “Does the gesture still count if it’s take out instead?”

Dream nods, unable to keep the grin off his face.

“Oh yeah,” he agrees. “Definitely counts.”

George raises an eyebrow.

“You’re just saying that cause you wanna keep kissing me,” he says.

“Uh-huh,” Dream confirms and pulls him in again.

The steak is unsalvageable, but the potatoes turn out just fine. They order Thai food anyway, and George steals half of Dream’s chicken, sitting beside him on the couch, stocking feet tucked underneath his thighs. The rain has evened out, and in the early hours of evening, between the great mountains of clouds, Dream can see the last beams of sunlight trickling through. In their living room, in the home that they’ve become so accustomed to sharing after all that time apart, Dream wraps his arm around George’s shoulders, relishing the way his body slots perfectly against his side. There’s no sense of urgency, no anxious tide of fear waiting to rise inside Dream’s gut. The road ahead feels long and worthwhile, perhaps more worthwhile than anything else he’s ever done in his life. And as always, George is there beside him, laughing at Dream’s stupid jokes and tracing his fingers along the palm of his hand, seeking out his lifeline. Dream wants for nothing. He

figures, no matter what happens, they will face it together. And there's no use rushing after things, not when the present feels so sweet.

Of course, there is plenty to worry about. Plenty he could try to anticipate, catastrophic scenarios he could dream up and then attempt to avoid. But for the first time, Dream allows himself the luxury of thinking that maybe, things will work out exactly as they are meant to. He loves George, George loves him, and nothing in the world matters more than that. After so much time spent waiting, Dream figures they both deserve to care a lot less about what the future has in store.

After all, we have forever, Dream thinks. They can afford to take their time.

Cherry Pie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“For the record,” George says, shifting his weight in what Dream assumes is an attempt to make it easier on his back. “I could carry you too.”

Dream rolls his eyes, even though from his current position he knows George can’t see it. Luckily, the trail is flat and un-treacherous, so even with the weight of another whole person on his back, Dream finds he can do the walk pretty easily. It helps that he’s been here before; his feet seem to remember the way on their own.

“Oh, I’m so sure,” Dream says, bumping his head against George’s chin. George sputters.

“Ew, you’re getting your hair in my mouth!” He exclaims, leaning back. Dream tightens his grip on his thighs, trying to steady him.

“Stop wiggling, I’m gonna lose my balance,” he cautions.

“Don’t,” George insists.

“It wouldn’t be my fault if I did,” Dream says, which earns him a whack to the arm. “Hey! You can always walk on your own.”

“Hmm, nope,” George says, popping the -p sound so his breath hits Dream’s ear. “I don’t even know where we’re going, remember?”

Dream is about to protest, but then George drops his head so his chin is resting on Dream’s shoulder, and all arguments swiftly disappear from his mind. Instead, he tilts his head and presses a kiss to the side of George’s jaw, an awkward placement but one of the only spots he can reach. George smiles, and Dream can feel the impression of it his against his neck.

“You smell good,” George murmurs, inhaling for emphasis.

“We smell the same,” Dream says, which had been the case for a while now. Sleeping in the same bed, showering together and sharing clothes tended to result in that.

“No, we don’t,” George corrects. “You smell...I don’t know. You smell different.”

“Different how?” Dream asks. Right now, due to the sun that is beating down on him from overhead, he’s pretty sure he just smells a lot sweatier.

“I don’t know,” George repeats. “You just smell like Dream.”

Dream chuckles. “Well then you smell like George.”

“And what does that smell like?” George asks, tapping his foot lightly against Dream’s thigh. Dream shrugs.

“I don’t know, just sort of stinky I guess,” he says. George bites down on his earlobe in retaliation.

“Oh my God, what the hell?” Dream demands, letting out a surprised laugh. “Who bites someone’s ear?”

“I am not stinky, you literally just said we smell the same!” George insists. “If anything, *you’re* the stinky one right now.”

“You don’t seem to mind though,” Dream points out. George doesn’t say anything, just lets his head drop down again, his face pressed into the crook of Dream’s shoulder. Dream’s chest does that warm, seizing thing again, an emotion he’s come to recognize as him feeling *giddy*. He’s fucking giddy around George.

“You can try to carry me,” he offers. “But I really like carrying you.”

“I know,” George says, not lifting up his face. “You’re obsessed with picking me up.”

“Obsessed is a strong word,” Dream says, though he consciously doesn’t bother to disagree. There’s no use in that; he already knows he wouldn’t have a leg to stand on.

“Some might even say accurate,” George replies, finally lifting his head up and shooting Dream a grin.

Dream keeps his eyes forward, but a smile emerges on his face all the same.

“It’s just up here,” he says, angling with his chin towards the break in the trees up ahead.

It’s not a particularly well trod path, and Dream does have to take care not to trip on a stray root here and there, but after a few minutes, they arrive at the clearing. Carefully, he leans back so George can hop down.

“Whoa,” George breathes. Dream turns around to look at him, smiling proudly.

“Cool, right?” He asks. George takes off the backpack (he’d been forced to wear it when he became Dream’s backpack) and sets it gingerly on the ground, almost as if he’s afraid to disturb the tranquil peace that they’ve stepped into.

They’re standing on a small, sloping patch of grass, surrounded by drooping trees on all sides, the air buzzing with a thick, muggy humidity. A few feet to their right is the main purpose of their expedition; a swimming hole, its clear water shining in the high afternoon sun. George takes a few steps forward, still with that same trepidation, like he’s entered into a museum.

“Look, I know you don’t love the beach,” Dream begins, walking over to stand beside him. “So I thought this might be better. There are no alligators either, I swear.”

George turns to look at him, a incredulous expression on his face. His caution of Floridan wildlife ran deep and actually living in the state had done nothing to dispel those fears.

“I’m serious! I used to swim here all the time as a kid,” Dream reassures. George’s expression shifts.

“You came here when you were a kid?” He asks, his voice gone quiet. Dream nods.

“Yeah, with my grandparents,” he says. “Technically the land belongs to their old neighbor, but they never use it, so-”

Dream throws his arms out, gesturing broadly to the whole area in front of them.

“-it’s ours!” He finishes. A smile emerges on George’s face.

“Does that mean we can swim naked?” He asks. Dream rolls his eyes and leans in, planting a kiss

on his forehead.

“Unpack the food,” he says when he pulls away. “I brought a blanket too.”

“So *that’s* why this was so heavy,” George grumbles, leaning down and unzipping the bag. He pulls out the blanket first, tossing it to Dream, then reaches in and grabs the sandwiches. It’s so damn hot that neither of them wanna wait to swim, so they just leave their stuff in a pile, shucking off their shirts as they make a bee-line down towards the water. Despite George’s initial suggestion, they do both keep their swim trunks on. Dream isn’t *that* bold - yet.

There’s not that much room for actual swimming, but Dream ducks beneath the surface anyway, content to let the cool water wash over him. He stays like that for as long as he can, until his lungs begin to burn under the strain, and when he emerges, George is standing there in the water waiting for him. His wet hair is slicked back, darkened by the moisture, save for one, stray strand that has fallen down over his sun-kissed face. He actually looks sort of *tan* now, a descriptor Dream didn’t think he’d ever use for George, who used to look like he carried a chill beneath his skin almost constantly. Dream wades over to him, until he’s close enough to count the freckles on the bridge of his nose, close enough to see the red marks that have yet to fade on the column of his throat, the marks that *Dream* left there. A shiver runs up his spine at the sight.

“Your hair is getting long,” Dream murmurs, bringing up a hand and tucking a strand of it back behind George’s ear.

“So is yours,” George says, eyes sparkling. Dream isn’t sure why that feels so significant, but all of a sudden, it really does. They’ve been together long enough for their hair to start to grow long. The thought makes his ribs feel tight.

“You know,” Dream says after a moment. “I was so nervous to get my haircut before you got here.”

George lets out a laugh. “What?”

“Yeah, like once the visa was confirmed, I had this nightmare scenario in my head of getting an awful haircut, right before you showed up.”

“What, you were worried you’d look dumb in the face reveal?” George asks teasingly.

“Well, yeah, but...I don’t know. I think I was more nervous about what *you* would think.”

George’s smile falters, just slightly. “Really?”

“I wanted to look nice,” Dream confesses. “For you.”

George stares at him. A droplet of water falls from his fringe; Dream follows its movements down the curve of his cheek.

“I didn’t think...” George trails off, his eyes searching. “I didn’t think you thought about me like that before I got here.”

“I didn’t think so either,” Dream admits. “But...I did. For a while, actually. I just don’t think I knew how to say it.”

George nods, but his expression is still wary, still unsure.

“When you said two weeks, I thought-” He stops himself, pressing his lips together.

"I know, I know, and I mean," Dream looks away, suddenly feeling a bit sheepish. "To be fair, that was about a more...*specific* realization."

George's face softens, and he brings a hand up, titling Dream's face back towards him.

"It was a while for me too," he says quietly.

"How long?" Dream asks, unable to stop himself. A beat of silence passes between them, and George doesn't say anything. Dream really thinks he may not get an answer, and is content with that fact, ready to move on if George needs him to. Then, George chuckles, his cheeks turning a soft, bashful pink.

"What year is it again?" He asks, clearly going for a joke. Dream's mouth slackens.

"George," he says, disbelieving. "Are you - do you mean -?"

"Ok, relax, it wasn't *that* long, really," George insists, his hand dropping from Dream's face, clearly embarrassed. "It was just...longer."

"You had a crush on me," Dream murmurs, completely awestruck. George's jaw tightens at the words, and Dream reaches forward, hand cupping his face. "*George.*"

"Stop," George insists, even as a small smile begins to tug at his lips. "It's embarrassing."

"It's not," Dream says, shaking his head. "I had a crush on you too."

"No, you didn't," George mutters.

"George," Dream begins firmly. "Do you wanna ask people whether or not they think I had a crush on you? Cause I think we both know what they'll say."

George actually laughs at that. Dream's heart give a joyful stutter at the sound. "Should we run a Twitter poll?"

"God, no," Dream insists. "Do you want me to be humiliated?"

George laughs again, and Dream takes the opportunity lean down and kiss him. George relaxes at the touch, bringing his arms up to encircle Dream's neck and leaning heavily on him, pressing their chests together.

"I sort of do," George murmurs between kisses. Dream leans back, only to begin to kiss down George's neck, appreciating the goosebumps that spring up along his damp skin.

"What?" He asks, before he brings his mouth down to lap at the hollow of George's collarbone. George gasps, throwing his head back.

"Want you to be humiliated," he says shakily. "It'd be - *ah* - very funny."

Dream raises his head, narrowing his eyes at the sight of George's grin.

"You just like seeing me embarrassed," he says accusingly.

"No, I don't," George retorts. "Maybe I just like people knowing how badly you want me."

Dream hesitates, his face growing warm at George's words. George's mouth curls up into a smile, and he leans in, speaking into the shell of Dream's ear.

“Maybe,” he murmurs. “I just like showing off.”

“Is that what you wanna do?” Dream asks, desire curling hotly in his gut. “Show me off?”

George doesn’t respond. He just shrugs, but his smile is a dead giveaway. Dream tugs him in again, hungrier this time, and George moans at the sudden pressure, allowing Dream to tease his mouth open with swift, eager licks. Dream can’t stop his hands from roaming everywhere; up George’s bare chest, along the curve of his waist, down to the slope of his ass. Every part of him that isn’t submerged feels like it’s been lit on fire, the sun turning his back the sort of pink George will surely chide him for later. George feels simultaneously solid and fluid under his hands; like he’s a part of the water, like he’s the only thing tethering Dream to the earth lest he float away.

“Thank you,” Dream murmurs against his lips, separating them by a breath. “For waiting for me.”

George pulls back, his fingers curling into the short hair at the nape of Dream’s neck. He looks softer now, calmer. Dream realizes soon George will start getting older here too. Both of them will. He can imagine it so clearly in his head; the few sparse grey hairs George has multiplying, the wrinkles around Dream’s own eyes deepening. In comparison to that, the time they spent apart feels minuscule. He’d been so terrified back then, so anxious at the prospect of what felt like an uncrossable gulf of loneliness in front of him. One day, Dream knows he will look back on all this and he will feel dwarfed by it, by the size of the impossible life he’s lived. But for now, he revels in how small he feels, here, where he thinks he could spend the rest of his days seeing himself reflected in George’s eyes.

“We waited for each other,” George says, and Dream knows he’s right, in more ways than one.

They don’t bother to towel off, just lie down flat on the blanket, allowing the sun to do the work for them. George finds a handful of small, white flowers and begins to place them in a row along Dream’s stomach, down to the waist of his swim trunks. Dream opens his eyes and peers down at him.

“George?” He asks.

“Yes, darling?” George says, looking up at him, his eyes teasing. Dream knows George mostly uses that pet-name as a joke, but that doesn’t stop him from blushing all the same. George’s hair has begun to dry into soft waves, falling loosely over his forehead, and Dream reaches out, taking one curl and wrapping it around his finger in a loose coil. George lets him, never taking his eyes off of Dream’s. Dream remembers how startled he was the first time George looked at him like that. How nervous he’d been. The thought makes him smile.

“I almost drove straight off the road when I picked you up from the airport,” he says, his original train of thought completely forgotten. “I was so distracted.”

George glows at the words.

“Feels like a long time ago,” he says, picking another flower up by the stem and laying it between Dream’s lungs. Dream breathes; watches his own chest expand with George’s hand resting on top of it.

“It feels like no time at all,” he murmurs, and realizes they’re both saying the same thing. Time was funny like that. One moment, he blinked, and it was like George had always been there. Like Dream had never known a life without George by his side. He’s certain that someday, in the not so distant future, he will blink again, and they’ll be settled into a new life together, and Dream will not be able to imagine them as they are now, without a solid foundation underneath them, without

a ring on each of their fingers.

And yet, there are moments like this, that feel like they could be bottled up and set aside. A singular, tiny universe that Dream could live inside of forever. Time wouldn't touch them here. Loving George was its own sort of immortality.

Seeming to sense his whirring thoughts, George abandons his art project and reaches a hand up, gently placing two fingers over each of Dream's eyes. Dream chuckles, allowing his eyelids to be slid closed. There's a small shuffle, a bit of movement, and Dream feels the impression of lips against his own. The kiss is warm and sure, George taking the lead and guiding Dream down onto his back. Dream lets himself fall open completely, his whole body going pliant as he melts into the ground. When George pulls away, Dream blinks his eyes open slowly, his head fuzzy. George hovers over him, hair falling down around his face, framed by the sun shining through the cover of trees overhead. *He's so beautiful*, Dream thinks, that same giddy feeling returning. *My boyfriend is so beautiful*.

"You're drooling a little," George points out fondly.

"I love you so much," Dream replies. George shakes his head, letting out a bright laugh, the kind that shows off all his teeth, which Dream adores. He loves every part of George, all the way back to his strangely perfect molars.

"I love you too," George says, softly, earnestly, and Dream feels the words burn all the way through him, like he's just swallowed his own heart. George lies down with him, resting his head on Dream's chest. A wind passes through the clearing, sending the branches rustling, a welcome break from the stifling humidity of the afternoon. Dream stretches his hand up, peering at the sun through the gaps in his fingers, and thinks of all the places from his childhood he'll bring George to, all the old spaces he will fill with his presence. The parks he wandered through alone, his old neighborhood, the cabin up north where he spent a winter with his family. The road where he fell off of his bike. The places he used to call home.

Finally, Dream lets his hand drop, wrapping his arm around George's shoulder instead. In retrospect, his life didn't feel so lonely after all, now that he understood that this, the two of them pressed up against each other with barely any space between their bodies, had been waiting for him all along. His life had been one long, slow descent in the shape of George, and Dream couldn't be happier to have fallen.

The crack of the bowling ball hitting the last remaining pin echoes through the cavernous room, and Karl lets out a yelp of victory, spinning around with his hands thrown up over his head. On the couch beside Dream, Sapnap lets his head fall in defeat.

"You fucker," he mutters. "You cheated."

"Sorry, what was that?" Karl asks sweetly, waltzing over to the couches with a wide grin on his face. "I didn't quite hear you."

"I said," Sapnap begins, much louder this time. "You cheated, dickhead!"

"See, that's what I thought you said." Karl plops down on the other side of Sapnap, throwing an arm over his shoulder. "And in response, might I offer that you suck my cock and balls."

Sapnap glowers, shrugging Karl's arm off of him only to be tugged back in harder, crushed in an

enthusiastic hug.

“You’re *such* a sore loser,” Quackity pipes up from the other couch, looking only half-interested in the conflict at hand. “So toxic.”

“You know, I saw a TikTok once that said you can either be good at sex or good at bowling, but it can’t be both,” George interjects from beside Dream, where he’s sitting tucked underneath his arm. Dream looks at him, eyebrows raised. Then, silently, all their eyes go to the scoreboard projected on the screen overhead.

“Ok, in that case Nick should’ve placed much higher,” Karl says, which earns him a hard jab in the ribs from Sapnap.

“Then I guess it makes sense why you won,” Sapnap retorts. “And why Dream came in second.”

“What?” Dream demands. “I didn’t even say anything!”

“George, is Dream bad at sex?” Quackity asks seriously. Dream gapes at him.

“*What?* Ok, come on, that’s not-”

“Yes,” George says, nodding his head solemnly. “So bad. Like, it’s embarrassing how bad he is.”

Quackity lets out a delighted laugh, and George turns to look up at Dream, a pleased grin on his face. Dream glares at him.

“You can’t say stuff like that, they’ll believe you!”

“To be clear, I already assumed you’d be bad at sex long before you started dating George,” Karl says, finally releasing Sapnap from his grip.

“Yeah, we didn’t need the confirmation,” Sapnap agrees, standing up and heading over to the console to reset the game. “Where is - PUNZ, YOU FUCKER, GET BACK HERE!”

Dream winces at the volume, incredibly grateful that he decided to splurge and rent out the entire bowling alley for the afternoon. Punz pokes his head out from the arcade area a few feet away.

“Come on, we’re doing another round,” Sapnap says. “Where are Tina and Foolish?”

“They found a racing game,” Punz says with a shrug. “They’ve been on that thing for the past hour. Did you guys really not notice?”

“Well, tell them to get their asses out here, we’re playing again and I’m not losing more money to Karl.”

“Just stop betting against me, man!” Karl says. “Clearly I am the best at bowling.”

“And therefore the worst at sex,” George reminds him. Karl flips him off good-naturedly, before standing up from the couch and walking over to the console as well, probably to reset his name for the next round. Sure enough, Dream sees the blinking text on screen switch from *SAPSMOM* to *GOGSMOM*.

“Hey!” George protests.

“Oh, change mine too.” Dream turns around to see Foolish jogging over with Tina and Punz in tow. “I don’t wanna be CHAD anymore.”

“Damn, sucks for you, cause you’re staying CHAD,” Karl dismisses without even turning around.

“I feel like mine should actually be changed though,” Dream says, staring pointedly at the *MYBITCH* name tag that has stood in place of his name for the past three rounds.

“Hm, no I like that one,” George says, leaning over and planting a kiss on Dream’s cheek. Dream rolls his eyes, but even still, he can feel his face begin to warm.

“I saw that!” Sarnap exclaims.

“So?” George demands. “I told you we’re not doing your stupid idea.”

“What idea?” Tina asks, settling onto the couch beside Quackity. She’s holding a large stuffed tiger in her hands, which Dream assumes is a product of her kicking Foolish’s ass in whatever arcade game they’d stumbled upon.

“Nick wants us to start a PDA jar,” Dream explains. “Like, put a dollar in every time we do it, or whatever.”

“I think it’s only fair, seeing as *I’m* the one who has to live with the two of you,” Sarnap says.

“Ok, first off all, it’s definitely not fair,” Dream insists. “Second of all, we literally never do PDA. Like, name a single time that’s happened.

“You guys were making out in the gym the other day,” Sarnap says accusingly, pointing a finger at the two of them. “The *gym*.”

Dream blanches, but George just rolls his eyes, scooting himself closer so he’s pressed up against Dream’s side.

“That’s not PDA, that was literally inside our house,” George clarifies. “So therefore it wasn’t in public.”

“Yeah, isn’t the definition of PDA that you do it in front of strangers?” Punz asks.

“Oh, the P could stand for Patches!” George says, laughing. “*Patches* displays of affection.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Foolish points out. George shoots him a glare.

“You don’t make sense,” George retorts, which just makes Foolish laugh. “*And* neither does Sarnap’s dumb jar idea. Dream and I are gonna make out wherever we want.”

That elicits a groan from all their friends, which merely serves to encourage George further. He leans up into Dream’s space and kisses him, making a big show of it, which Dream happily goes along with, despite the embarrassed flush he can feel rising on his cheeks. The groans only increase, but then something smacks against the side of George’s head, prompting him to pull away. They both turn to see Tina’s stuffed tiger lying beside them, and Quackity’s arm extended from the other couch.

“Sorry!” Tina says. “He snatched it from me.”

“That was deserved,” Quackity insists. “It’s bad enough George has to *tell* me about everything-”

“Shut up!” George exclaims, jumping up from the couch. Quackity puts his hands up, but George has already grabbed the tiger and is approaching him with it raised threateningly in his hand.

“OK!” Karl exclaims before it can escalate any further. “Dream and George are gross and in love, what’s new. Punz, you’re up first. It’s time for Sap to lose more money to me.”

George still whacks Quackity firmly on the head with the toy before relinquishing it to Tina again. Quackity gets in a kick to George’s shin, but before George can retaliate, Dream finally stands up and tugs him away by the waist.

The actual act of telling everyone, something Dream had agonized over before, was relatively painless, all things considered. Sapnap had been first, obviously. They told him over breakfast, hovering an awkward distance away from each other, which made Dream’s hands itch with the urge to reach over and tug George closer to him. It was the first time Dream heard George use the word “dating” out loud. It made him so happy he seriously thought he was going to throw up.

“I knew it,” Sapnap said, shaking his head. “I knew it all along.”

“No, you didn’t,” George insisted. Sapnap held his gaze stubbornly before letting out a groan.

“Ok, fine! I didn’t know, but I would’ve figured it out,” he grumbled.

“Are you...mad?” Dream asked, which felt like a silly question to pose, but one he needed to bring up all the same. He’d never kept anything from Sapnap in his whole life, and this was a pretty big thing to have not shared sooner.

“No, man, I’m not *mad*.” Sapnap snorted, like the notion was ridiculous. “I mean...it’s a little weird. Like, you guys are my best friends.”

Dream waited for a follow-up but none arrived. Sapnap looked down at his feet hastily. For a surreal moment, Dream felt like they were kids again, still too young to articulate themselves well, desperate to hold onto what felt like one of the first real friendships either of them had had. It occurred to Dream then that, as long as he’d known Sapnap, he couldn’t think of a single thing that mattered more to him in life than his friends. Dream glanced over at George, whose expression softened at the sight.

“Well, yeah,” George muttered. “Obviously.”

Sapnap looked back up, and for the first time, the awkwardness between them seemed to break. Dream could feel his body relax, shoulders loosening as he came to the realization that there was nothing to worry about. Of course there wasn’t. It was Sapnap, after all.

“How long?” Sapnap asked after a moment.

“A couple of weeks,” Dream explained. “But, uh, we’ve both known for much longer.”

He could feel George’s eyes on him when he said the words. Sapnap looked between them, a reluctant smile on his face.

“Well, that’s wonderful, but you guys have to respect roommate rules, alright?” He demanded, crossing his arms firmly over his chest in what Dream assumed was meant to be a posture of authority. “Like, no doing...*stuff* in shared spaces.”

Dream felt the back of his neck prickle with shame. George just smiled, the very portrait of innocence.

“Of course,” he agreed easily. Dream didn’t dare look at him, positive the obvious embarrassment on his face would expose them both. Sapnap, however, just nodded, seeming to buy it without

question.

“Cool,” he said, stuffing his hands into his pockets. “I - ugh, no. Gross. Ok, never mind.”

“What?” Dream asked, stalling him before he could turn to leave. Sapnap looked between them again, a vaguely pained expression on his face.

“I love you guys,” he muttered. “That’s all.”

Dream beamed at him. “I love you too, Nick.”

The two of them turned to look at George expectantly.

“What?” George demanded. “I’m not gonna say it too!”

“Come on, *Gogy*,” Sapnap said with an exaggerated pout. “Say you *wuv us*.”

“Shut up!” George exclaimed, clearly trying to hold back laughter.

“Aw, it’s ok,” Sapnap said, walking over and patting George lightly on the cheek, which earned him a murderous glare in response. “I already know you do.”

Dream didn’t think it could be as simple as that, but it really was. Obviously Sapnap got annoyed sometimes, either at Dream’s obvious infatuation or George’s inability to keep his hands to himself, but he also seemed incredibly pleased to have a brand new thing to tease the two of them about. And of course, it was still the same Sapnap that Dream had always known; loyal and trustworthy, with a much softer heart than he usually let on. The same person Dream had befriended all those years ago, and the same person he knew he’d remain friends with for the rest of his life.

After that, it all happened rather quickly. As their friends all finally made plans to come visit the house, the two of them dropped the news one by one. Well, Dream was usually the one to actually tell people, while George listened on with fond exasperation. Once Dream actually got the hang of telling people, it became sort of addicting. Sharing with people how much he loved George had always been one of his favorite things to do.

Initially, they’d planned to have people over separately, but once Quackity had bought his plane ticket, Karl insisted on coming as well, with Foolish tagging along. Punz was an easy addition, there was no way they were gonna leave out Tina, so it ended up being a house decision to say fuck it and host everyone for a week. The first night with everyone in the house was overwhelming in the best way, and even when he and George ended up sneaking off for the night, Dream was still buzzing with the excitement of finally having so many people that he loved under one roof.

“Tired?” George asked when they finally made it upstairs to Dream’s room, careful to keep their footsteps light. Dream nodded, collapsing back onto the bed.

“Yeah,” he murmured. “Good tired, though.”

George nodded like he understood, sitting down beside Dream and running a hand through his hair. Dream let out a breath, instantly feeling the nerves drain out of his body.

“It’s...a lot,” George agreed. As if on cue, from downstairs came a loud crash and the sound of laughter, nearly drowned out by the thumping bass of the music that was still playing. George winced, before letting out a small laugh. “I think everyone is happy, though.”

“Are you happy?” Dream asked. George tucked his feet up onto the bed, tugging the fabric of Dream’s OU hoodie down to cover his legs. He rested his chin on his knees, seeming to think about it for a moment.

“Yes,” he finally said. “I’m happy when everyone is here, obviously, but...I don’t know. I’m happy when it’s just us, too.”

Dream nodded, a soft smile on his face. He leaned up onto his elbows, capturing George’s hand in his own and laying a gentle kiss on his palm.

“Me too,” he said. It was impossible not to imagine the numerous events that awaited them; conventions and meet-ups, traveling to visit friends, to see family, to go back to the UK at some point. Dream’s social battery had been shrunk down substantially over the years, and the prospect of stepping so far out of his comfort zone felt daunting at times. But he knew that as long as George was with him, everything was going to be ok. It always was.

“YES! OH MY GOD, YES, FUCK YOU.” Sapnap’s cheers snap Dream out of his thoughts. He looks over to see a row clear of pins and Sapnap standing there victoriously. “Suck my dick, bro!”

“I’m literally still beating you!” Karl points out, gesturing up at the board.

“Not for long,” Sapnap insists. “I’m making a comeback, I can feel it.”

“You’re coming *where*?” Quackity asks, standing up from the couch to take his turn. “Gross, dude.”

George snorts. “That’s disgusting Sapnap, we’re literally in public.”

Sapnap shoots him a look before flopping down onto the couch beside Karl, prodding him in the ribs until Karl shows him whatever dumb thing he’s laughing at on his phone. Punz leans over as well, and that’s when Dream realizes they’re probably plotting something nefarious, like finding some weird, niche tourist attraction to drag them all off to after they’re done here.

To Dream’s left, Tina plops down onto the couch beside George, holding her phone out.

“What do you think?” She asks. Dream cranes his neck over to catch a glimpse of her screen, where he can see a selfie that she took earlier with George in the mirror of some store they’d gone into. George flushes, clearly uncomfortable with the attention.

“Uh, yeah, it’s good,” he mutters. “You can post it, I guess.”

Dream nudges him with his shoulder, prompting George to look over at him.

“You look really good there,” he says earnestly. George’s ears turn a bright shade of pink, and he looks away hurriedly, suddenly very interested in the galaxy patterned carpet beneath their feet. Tina catches Dream’s eye and grins.

“I know his angles, what can I say?” She shrugs. “*Someone* around here has to take decent photos. All the ones on Foolish’s camera look like CCTV footage.”

“I heard that!” Foolish calls over from the other couch.

“It’s true!” She shoots back. “You’re hanging out with your friends, not hunting Bigfoot!”

“Ok, that’s it,” Foolish exclaims, suddenly standing up. “Screw this, we’re having a rematch. And

I'm not letting you win this time."

Tina jumps up from the couch eagerly, already following him back over to the arcade. At her departure, George sags back against Dream's shoulder.

"Tired?" Dream murmurs into his hair. George looks up at him and nods, lips pressed together in a faint smile.

"Everyone's leaving tomorrow," he says, sounding unsure, like he can't quite figure out how to feel about that fact.

"Yeah, but they'll be back," Dream reassures. George nods, eyes drifting away to watch Quackity bowl another spare.

"That being said," George begins after a moment, leaning up to whisper into Dream's ear. "Sapnap is going to North Carolina for a bit."

Dream flushes at the implications. "Uh-huh."

"Which means..." George murmurs, meeting Dream's eyes. "We'll have the house to ourselves."

Dream glances over at the other couch, where Sapnap still seems engrossed in his conversation with Karl and Punz.

"What about Nick's rule?" He asks, making sure to keep his voice low. George shrugs.

"What he doesn't know won't hurt him."

Dream glances up towards the ceiling, already feeling his (very thin) layer of resolve crumbling.

"You know, I'm starting to worry that I'm not a very good roommate," he admits. George grins, reaching up and taking Dream's chin in his hand.

"Hm, maybe," he agrees. "But you're a *very* good boyfriend."

Dream absolutely melts at the words, and goes easily when George tugs him in for a kiss. This time, if any of their friends happen to groan at the sight, Dream doesn't bother to pay them any mind.

When the cold comes, it comes all at once. Dream wakes up one morning to a chilled breeze blowing through his open bedroom window, and suddenly he's aware of the fact that soon, the warmth that welcomed George into Florida will dissipate. Florida winters are short and mild, and yet when goosebumps spring up along Dream's skin as the cool air settles around him, he can't help but wish for snow.

He turns his head to see George still fast asleep beside him, curled in on himself like a waning moon. Christmas is still far off, and yet Dream can't stop himself from imagining it. Their first Christmas together. The thought makes his adrenaline spike, a gut reaction to the inevitable follow-up: their first Christmas together *of many*.

Dream always knew George was gonna be in his life forever. The second they were pulled into each other's orbits, then thrust back into each other's lives again not long after, as if the universe was being particularly persistent about their meeting, Dream understood that George was not the

type of person you simply met and then moved on from. Anyone who met him would say the same thing. And yet, it still startles Dream sometimes, as if his brain is constantly getting used to the fact that yes, this is person he's going to spend the rest of his life with. He still catches himself smiling dumbly in the mirror while he's brushing his teeth, or grinning at nothing while he's on stream, all because he remembers George is in the other room, napping or playing with Patches or just waiting for Dream to come back and hang out with him again.

He can recall the words of his parents when he first began to crave independence, when he first decided to start his own career. *You're so young*, his mom would say, her brow drawn. Dream didn't understand it then; he'd never felt older in his life. But now, lying next to the person he's going to grow old beside, Dream understands how young he truly was, how young he still is. He can imagine his child-self so clearly, as if he's just a breath away from the life Dream is living now. Freckled and lanky, always frustrated, always bouncing off the walls, desperate to be understood, to make sense of all the thoughts buzzing around in his head. Trying so hard to be smart, to be impressive, to be *good*. Dream imagines himself kneeling down in front of him and saying, just as his mother used to: *You're so young*. Then giving himself the reassurance he always craved but never believed, the words that, if he'd heard them, would've settled his heart, just a little: *But it's going to be ok. I promise*.

Dream inhales sharply, surprised by the sudden press of tears that emerge behind his eyes. Beside him, George stirs, blinking his eyes open slowly. He lets out a loud yawn, then turns his head to look at Dream, his expression mused and sleepy.

"Hi," he murmurs. Dream reaches forward, fondly brushing the hair away from George's face.

"Hey," he replies, so in love it hurts to breathe.

"I had a dream last night that Skeppy was in our house," George says. Dream lets out a disbelieving laugh.

"What? No, you didn't."

"I did!" George insists, sitting up onto his elbows. "He was like, in our house and he wouldn't leave. He kept on eating all our cereal, I remember that."

Dream shakes his head. "Your subconscious is so strange."

George shrugs, flopping back down onto the pillow.

"Maybe that just means we need to buy more cereal," he says. "Or never invite Skeppy over."

"Hm, we can pick up more today," Dream says, lying back down beside him. "And officially ban Skeppy from our home."

George nods, satisfied, and turns back over onto his side. Dream follows the motion with his own body, slotting himself against George's back and pressing a kiss against the space behind his ear. George hums at the contact, relaxing into the mattress, and Dream really thinks they might both drift back off to sleep like this.

Then, George pushes his hips back, a small, intentional bit of pressure. Dream bites his lower lip, conscious of the swiftness with which his blood rushes southward. George could just be getting comfortable, so Dream does his best to keep his breathing steady, even as he feels himself begin to grow hard in his boxers. Unable to resist, he brings a hand up and snakes it underneath the fabric of George's t-shirt, laying it flat against the warm skin of his belly. George lets out a shuddering

breath.

“What’r’you doing?” He asks, voice no louder than a whisper.

“Holding you,” Dream says. “That alright?”

George nods, sinking his body even further into Dream’s, like he wants to be enveloped completely. He rolls his hips back again and Dream groans, the slide of George’s ass against his clothed cock making his head spin. He catches the fin of George’s hipbone in his hand and presses down firmly.

“George,” he cautions.

“You’re hard,” George points out plainly. “Feels good.”

He repeats the motion, circling his hips back, tugging out a moan from somewhere low in Dream’s chest.

“Fucking hell,” Dream swears. “You tease.”

George actually giggles at the words, craning his neck back.

“Not a tease,” he insists. “Just want you to fuck me.”

He pushes back further, until Dream’s cock is pressed flushed against the seam of his ass. Dream is fully hard now, straining against the thin fabric of his underwear. His head feels fuzzy and warm, still half-drenched in sleep, and all he can focus on is how fucking amazing George feels slotted up against him like, like their bodies were made to fit together.

The collar of George’s oversized t-shirt has slipped down to reveal a wide swath of his shoulder, and Dream presses his mouth against it, sucking harshly at the skin. George groans, letting his head fall back.

“Dream, please,” he begs, voice cracking around the words.

“Shh, baby,” Dream soothes, releasing George’s hip and bringing his hand down lower, ghosting over the outline of George’s erection. “Be patient.”

“Oh, fuck off,” George groans. Dream grins against his skin, slowing his pace even further, until George is practically bucking his hips up to meet him, desperate to chase any friction Dream may provide. Dream’s fingers just barely brush over his cock before he pulls his hand away. George lets out a broken whine.

“Gonna go slow,” Dream murmurs gently, bring his hand back up to rub soothing circles in George’s skin. “That ok?”

“You’re trying to kill me,” George protests. Dream places a kiss down against his shoulder.

“M not,” he reassures. “Gonna make you feel so good, George, ok? You trust me?”

After a beat of hesitation, George nods, his head lolling back. Dream can see his eyes slide shut.

“Yes,” he breathes. “Yes, yes, I trust you.”

Dream kisses his shoulder again, a silent thanks, and brings his hand down, this time slipping it underneath the waistband of George’s boxers. George lets out a sigh, eyes still screwed shut as

Dream carefully thumbs over the head of his cock, keeping his movements delicate. George opens his mouth, letting out a ragged breath.

“So pretty,” Dream breathes, using his other hand to tilt George’s chin towards him. “So pretty like this, George.”

George’s eyes flutter open and Dream lowers his head, bringing their mouths together just as he takes George fully in his hand. George gasps, arching up into the touch. He kisses George slowly, sliding their tongues together as he begins to stroke down the length of his cock, using the precum gathering at his tip to slick up his hand. Dream is so hard it’s painful, but he ignores it, instead devoting all his focus to George: the silky glide of his cock against Dream’s palm, the ruddy flush of his cheeks, the needy moans that Dream keeps coaxing from him. It’s fucking mesmerizing, watching George come apart underneath his hands like this. For a minute, Dream finds himself focusing solely on the frantic, rabbit-quick rise and fall of his chest. With his free hand, he pushes George’s shirt up to his collarbone, until he can see the long, tenuous expanse of his chest. Dream thumbs at his nipple, and George lets out a cry, bucking his chest up into Dream’s hand, encouraging him further. Dream teases at the bud in the way he knows George enjoys, and George’s face contorts at the touch, his teeth emerging to bite at his lower lip, turning it bright red and slick with spit.

The sight of George’s mouth is too inviting, and Dream can’t resist placing the pad of his finger down onto his tongue. George laps at it eagerly, until Dream slips another finger inside and George closes his lips around the digits. Dream’s vision nearly goes white at the hot, slick feeling of George’s mouth against his skin, enraptured by the way George seems near-drunk on the taste.

“Want you inside me,” George says when Dream pulls his fingers out, leaving a trail of spit dribbling down George’s chin. He angles his neck back and catches Dream’s gaze, eyes heavy and dark. “Wanna be close to you.”

“Of course,” Dream says, kissing George’s cheek, his jaw, his nose, any part of him that Dream’s lips can reach. “You aren’t sore from yesterday?”

George huffs out a laugh.

“Good sore,” he reassures, turning his head and catching Dream’s lips again. The kiss is surprisingly chaste, despite the circumstances. “Come on, I want it.”

Dream shakes his head, a fond smile rising to his lips.

“Well, if you *want* it,” he drawls. George shoots him a glare, but Dream just grins, finally removing his hand from George’s cock. George seems genuinely offended by the sudden change, but then Dream begins to tug his boxers off, and George quickly adjusts his posture, allowing space for Dream to slide them down over the curve of his ass. He hooks his other arm underneath George’s body, his hand coming to rest possessively against his chest, holding them flush together even as he reaches back to grab the small bottle of lube from their bedside table.

True to his word, he takes his time working George open, relishing the high, sharp sounds he makes as Dream presses his fingers in deeper. Dream appreciates the ritual of it all, the incremental way in which George unravels, until his back is arching and he’s begging all over again, one hand splayed over Dream’s hip, pulling him closer.

“Now, Dream, come on, I need it,” he babbles. “Need your cock, please.”

Dream thinks it’d be redundant to tell him to be patient again, especially considering how badly he

wants it too, so he does as he's told. He lines his cock up with George's entrance and begins to push in, slow and deliberate, mouth parting as George's body welcomes him in.

"Here, baby," he murmurs, breath stuttering. "There you go."

"*Fuck*," George sighs. The hand on Dream's hip tightens until he's certain it will bruise. "More, Dream."

"Slow, remember?" Dream reminds teasingly, but even then, he can feel his own resistance wearing thin. He pushes in another inch and George groans, his cheek pressed flat against the pillow as his eyes flutter shut again.

"s good, Dream," George says, words flowing together, like he's barely clinging onto coherency. "Feel so full."

Dream pulls back, just barely, before pressing in even deeper, biting back a moan at the delicious feeling of George clenching around him. He feels like he could do this for hours, even though he's certain he wouldn't last that long. George seems more relaxed now, at ease, even as his hand remains locked on Dream's hip, gently guiding him forward when Dream thrusts in again.

"Could do this forever," he says, pressing a kiss to the top of George's spine. "Spend the whole day fucking you."

"*Please*," George breathes, mouth falling open.

"You want that?" Dream murmurs, arousal snapping like a wild dog in his gut. "Wanna sit on my cock all day?"

"*Fuck*, Dream, yes, yes," George groans. The idea of that is so fucking hot Dream can't help but push deeper, his body acting of its own accord now. When he finally bottoms out, his brain all but goes blank, the world reduced to nothing but the two of them. Dream stills, blood thrumming low and stormy in his veins, a restless tide, until his entire body is shaking with it, pleasure building up inside of him in shockwaves.

"*Yes*," George sobs. "Move, Dream, I need you to move."

Controls slips effortlessly from his grasp and Dream just *acts*, his body responding to George's words on instinct. His hips snap forward, drawing a whine from George's lips, and then he's thrusting harder, building up a steady rhythm as George's body rocks back against him.

"Harder, harder," George demands, never satiated. Dream obeys, bringing his hand down to steady George's hip, giving him better leverage to fuck into him. George is nearly panting now, his breath coming harsh and shallow. "So good, Dream, *fuck*, that's so good."

George tilts his head to the side and Dream captures his lips, kissing him until they're all but breathing into each other's mouths.

"M close," Dream rasps. George brings his teeth down, biting at Dream's lower lip until Dream can taste copper. Dream's head swims at the shock of pain and the overwhelming waves of pleasure that follow in its wake. "Fuck, George."

"C'mon baby, give it to me," George urges, and even as Dream closes his eyes, he can *feel* George's gaze on him. With every thrust he makes he can feel George push back to meet him, their bodies moving in perfect sync. Dream wouldn't be surprised if their hearts were beating at the same pace too. It's a challenge George is issuing, always a challenge, so Dream doesn't hold back,

thrusting into him until George is practically bouncing on his cock, breathless, fucked-out sounds rising from his throat as Dream chases his orgasm. It doesn't take much longer before the band inside of him *snaps* and Dream can feel himself shoot off inside of George, filling him up. George moans lewdly, head falling back against Dream's shoulder, a mumbled chorus of *yes* and *Dream* echoing through their bedroom.

Dream's thrusts slow, the aftershocks making his body go limp, and he brings his hand down to wrap around George's cock. George's own hand comes to rest over Dream's, intertwining their fingers, and he moves them together, working the tight circle of Dream's curled palm down onto his flushed, weeping cock. It doesn't take long before George is spurting up into his hand, eyes still fixed on Dream's face. When he cums, his whole body collapses back against Dream, all the tension leaving him in one, fractured cry.

They lie there like that for a while, breathing together. Dream moves to pull out, but George stills him with a hand on his hip, keeping him in place.

"Not yet," he murmurs, kissing Dream's cheek. Dream nods, basking in the sensation of still being buried deep inside George, his whole body hyperaware of every sensation, every movement George makes. They stay like that, connected to each other, and Dream has never felt more comfortable. More safe.

"Love you so much," he whispers, burying his face in George's hair. He isn't sure how much time passes before George finally begins to move his body away. Dream slowly pulls out, only for George to roll over, pressing their bodies together again and planting a firm kiss against Dream's lips.

"I love you too," George says when they part. Dream grins at him, and George traces the outline of his lips with his thumb, stalling over the small nick where he drew blood.

"You're really beautiful when you cum," George murmurs, almost distractedly. Dream feels his entire body go hot. George smiles triumphantly, always so pleased when he manages to leave Dream truly flustered. "Just an observation."

"You keep talking like that and it's gonna start going to my head," Dream murmurs, completely transfixed. George cocks his head to the side, leaning in further, until Dream's eyes go blurry.

"We wouldn't want that," he says. "Your ego is big enough as it is."

"You love it," Dream responds automatically. George rolls his eyes.

"You'd like to think so, wouldn't you?"

"Mhm," Dream confirms, craning his neck up and pressing a slow, lingering kiss to George's lips. When he pulls away, George's cheeks are blotchy with color again. "Yet another thing I would be right about."

"Well, the list is short, so I'm glad you're keeping track," George quips. Dream grins despite himself, unable to fight the overwhelming tide of affection that rises up within him.

"George," he says solemnly, taking George's face in his hands and squishing his cheeks together. "I think I'm infatuated with you."

George laughs, smacking his hands away.

"I know, idiot," he says. "I'm pretty sure the whole world knows."

“Good,” Dream says. “I want them too.”

George shakes his head, a disbelieving smile on his face.

“Just don’t do anything stupid, ok?” He cautions. “No tattoos of my face or whatever.”

“No promises,” Dream says. George whacks him on the chest.

“Shut up!” He insists with a laugh. “My name, on the other hand...that might make a *great* tattoo. Wait, no, get *Subscribe to GeorgeNotFound* written across your chest!”

Dream laughs, placing a hand on the back of George’s head and tugging him in for a kiss. Another breeze blows through the window, sending a shiver up his spine, and he pulls George closer, until he’s practically lying on top of Dream, a solid, steady weight pressing him down into the bed. George’s hand comes up to hold his cheek, his touch gentle, and Dream is surprised to feel his eyes well up again. He still finds himself constantly overwhelmed by it; how sweet George is to him. How good, how honorable. Dream pulls away slightly, embarrassed by the tears that begin to cloud his vision.

“Hey, hey,” George murmurs, concern lacing his tone. “You alright?”

“Yeah.” Dream looks away, embarrassment making his face hot. “I’m just happy. Sorry, it’s dumb.”

“No, stop, it’s not dumb,” George insists. “I’m happy too. *Really* happy. Stupid happy.”

Dream lets out a shaky laugh, blinking away the tears from his eyes. George reaches up, thumbing at his cheek. Dream leans into the touch, feeling fragile.

“You’re so good to me,” Dream murmurs, his voice like glass. George’s dark eyes search his face. “Why are you so good to me?”

George furrows his brow. “Because I love you. Besides, it’s easy being good to you. It’s, like, the easiest thing in the world.”

Dream shakes his head. “I don’t think that’s true.”

“Sure it is,” George says with a shrug. “And I’d still be good to you, even if it wasn’t.”

Dream lets the tears flow freely now, unashamed. George leans in and places a kiss on his cheek, catching some of the moisture there. When he pulls away, his eyes are damp too.

“You know, I didn’t expect it to feel like this,” Dream murmurs, letting out another small laugh. “Being in love, I mean. Being in love with *you*.”

A curious smile rises to George’s lips.

“What does it feel like?”

Dream leans forward, bumping their foreheads together.

“Like waking up.”

He hears George inhale shakily, feels the warm breath against his face. Without a word, George wraps his arms around Dream’s shoulders, tucking his face into the crook of his neck. Dream brings his hands up, bracketing George’s waist, and holds him close. At the touch, George burrows

his face in further, like he's trying to find a way under Dream's skin. Dream laughs, pressing a kiss to the crown of George's head.

"You know, we can't actually meld together."

"Yes we can," George mumbles into his skin. "Just need to find my way inside."

"I mean, to be fair, you're inside me plenty already," Dream says with a grin. George pulls his head up to glare at him.

"Different kind of inside," he clarifies, scooting down to rest his chin on Dream's chest.

"I know," Dream reassures, bringing a hand up to run it through George's hair. "I get it."

And he really does. It already feels like George is a part of him, to the point where sometimes it feels wrong that they are two separate people. George is just as vital to him as any organ - how is Dream expected to live with his own heart walking around outside his chest?

George closes his eyes, melting at the touch of Dream's fingers. He lets out a pleased hum, and Dream feels the vibrations of it against his ribs. *Like he's purring*, Dream realizes, and bites back a laugh at the thought.

"We do need to get up though," he reminds gently, reluctantly breaking the silence. George opens one eye to peer up at him.

"Why?" He demands.

"Cause my mom is coming over today, remember?" Dream grins. "We're making a pie."

George blanches. "Oh, God. I didn't think you were serious about that."

"Oh, I'm *deadly* serious," Dream says. "We are making a pie together, George."

George groans, burying his face in Dream's chest.

"That sounds hard," he mutters.

"Oh, come on, it'll be fun," Dream insists. "How hard can it be, really?"

The answer turns out to be pretty damn hard, which Dream honestly should've seen coming. Two hours later, when he's trying his best to figure out what the fuck a lattice is supposed to look like, he actually feels *sweat* spring up on his brow, as if trying to cut dough into shapes is some monumental act of physical labor. Frankly, it *is* just as taxing as working out, and requires substantially more precision. Behind him, he hears George laugh, and Dream glances over his shoulder to see his mom (wearing a particularly obnoxious apron a fan had sent to the P.O. box - *Nobody Likes A Soggy Bottom!*, complete with a picture of a frowning pie on the front) look up from her phone guiltily.

"Whatever you're showing him, stop it," Dream warns.

"I'm not showing him anything," she insists.

"You never told me you dressed up as a pumpkin for Halloween!" George exclaims with a massive grin, looking like Dream's mom just handed him the greatest present in the world.

"Yes, when I was like, five years old," Dream clarifies. "All of my other halloween costumes after

that were *very* cool.”

“I think the pumpkin was pretty cool,” George says, glancing back down at the phone. “The Dalmatian one was cute too.”

“Oh my God,” Dream groans. “Ok, no more photos please.”

Judging by the chorus of giggles that follows when he turns around, Dream is pretty sure his plea is completely ignored.

Another hour later and the three of them are standing in front of a steaming cherry pie resting on a cooling rack by the window. Dream narrows his eyes at it appraisingly. It looks...

“Creative,” George supplies. “Or, um, what’s the word? For modern art?”

“Avant-garde,” Dream mutters, wondering if maybe rotating the plate would improve the appearance somewhat. It would at least help him hide the burnt bits.

“I think it turned out great, bunny,” his mom says, planting a kiss on the side of his head. At the use of the familiar nickname, Dream feels his neck go hot, but when he looks over at George, he sees nothing but affection in his eyes. Dream’s chest tightens at the sight, suddenly overwhelmed by how wonderful it is to get to share this with him. He wonders when George will get to meet the rest of his family, or when Dream will get the chance to travel to the UK and meet George’s. He’s sure it will happen eventually, but for now, Dream feels no desire to rush it. They’ve already made a home for themselves here.

George nudges Dream with his shoulder.

“Well, come on,” he says, looking up at him. “It probably tastes better than it looks.”

Much to Dream’s surprise, George is right. It tastes delicious. Once they eat their fill, he sends his mom home with extra slices for his siblings. Later, when his mom has left and he’s washing up the last of the dishes, George comes over and kisses him, lips still stained red. He tastes like sugar and caramel, so sweet it makes Dream’s legs feel weak.

“You were right,” George says when they part, smiling up at Dream. “That was fun.”

“You spent the whole time looking at embarrassing baby pictures of me,” Dream points out.

“I know. That was the fun part,” George says slowly, like it’s obvious. “Besides, all those photos are important. I wanna know everything about you.”

Dream laughs. “You already do.”

“No, I don’t,” George says, laying a hand at the curve of Dream’s waist, the gentle touch making Dream’s insides go all goopy. “But I’m gonna learn.”

“And what about you?” Dream prompts. “When am I gonna get to see *your* humiliating childhood photos?”

“There are none,” George says plainly. “I was a very cool baby.”

Dream shakes his head, unable to keep the amused smile off his face, and tugs George in for another swift, cherry-flavored kiss.

“You know,” Dream says when he pulls away, glancing out the window into their backyard. “I’ve

been thinking about planting a garden.”

George frowns at him. “Really?”

“Yeah, I mean, we have the space for it,” Dream says with a shrug. “Might be nice to watch something grow.”

George follows Dream’s gaze out to the yard, a contemplative expression on his face.

“Well, gardens a lot of work,” he says. “And I *do* like watching you sweat.”

Dream chuckles, bumping George lightly with his hip.

“In that case, I’ll get started first thing tomorrow.”

George turns his head and smiles, the late afternoon light burnishing him in shades of gold. True to form, Dream feels himself bowled over by another, startling realization, as he was wont to do when George and the kitchen were involved. He reaches up and brushes the hair out of George’s face and thinks, in perfect clarity, *I want to start a family with you.*

He laughs to himself at the absurdity of it, at the unavoidable truth. They're so young, not even married yet, and even still, Dream knows in that moment exactly what his future holds.

“What?” George asks, confusion evident. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” Dream assures, shaking his head. “I just really, really love you.”

George rolls his eyes, mouth pulled taut in the clear beginnings of a smile.

“Who knew you were so sappy?” He asks. Dream actually *sees* the thought dawn on him, and a second later George’s face lights up. “Ha! Sappy. Like Sapnap.”

Dream scoffs. “Speaking of, aren’t you supposed to be recording a Banter episode tonight?”

“Ugh, fine,” George groans, taking an exaggerated step away from Dream. “If you hate me and want me gone, just say so.”

“So dramatic,” Dream chastises, planting a firm kiss on the top of George’s head. George glares at him, but there’s no real heat behind it. “Have fun.”

George turns to go, and Dream picks up another plate in the sink, turning the water back on. He scrubs away in silence until, out of nowhere -

“Dream!”

Dream almost drops the plate in surprise. He turns to see George poking his head in through the doorway, a wide grin on his face.

“Jesus, you scared me,” Dream exhales. “What?”

“Nothing,” George says cheekily. “I just really, really love you too.”

Dream’s entire body sings at the words. A dizzying memory returns to him; that same, striking blend of familiarity and discovery that he felt the first morning George was in the house. Every time George said he loved him, it felt brand new, and yet Dream felt as if he’d been hearing those words his entire life. As familiar as his own heartbeat.

“Now who’s being sappy?” He asks, aware of how his voice wavers, of how completely lovesick he sounds.

“Still you,” George says with a knowing look, and turns to leave again. Dream sighs, wondering how his heart is going to hold up against an entire lifetime of this. Is it possible to be so in love it incapacitates you? Maybe, but God, what a great way to go.

The dishes keep his hands busy as Dream’s mind wanders. A few floors up, he can just barely hear a loud peal of laughter echo from George’s room, a sure sign that they’ve started recording. He grins to himself, eyes drifting out to the backyard once more. He knows the days are getting shorter, and soon, it will be too late in the season for anything to blossom. But in the meantime, Dream cannot help but imagine a lawn bursting with color; crimson roses and blue forget-me-nots, yellow daffodils and swathes of purple lavender. If he closes his eyes, he can almost feel the warmth of the dirt against his back. Feel the beating sun on his face.

It will be a long time before anything starts to bloom. Dream figures it’s more than worth the wait.

When Dream finally straightens up at his desk, his back screams at him in protest, a sure sign that he’s been hunched over his keyboard far too long. He rubs at his eyes, bleary and aching from staring at his monitor for hours on end. He isn’t sure what time it is - stuff like that tended to slip away from him on editing days. It was annoying to have to lock himself away all day, particularly now that he had ways he’d much rather be spending his time, but still - sometimes work *did* have to come first. George vehemently disagreed with this sentiment, but in the end, he still sat down for a recording session earlier in the day too. It’s been a couple hours since then, and Dream already misses him. But, he figures as he glances at his phone to see that it’s fast approaching 2 AM, George is probably dead asleep by now. Dream sighs, leaning back in his chair. His brain is far too active, and even though he doesn’t think he could stand to look at his editing software for one more second, he’s knows he’s not gonna be able to fall asleep even if he tried.

Rotating his neck in an attempt to dispel some of the stiffness, he glances around his office, looking for something to occupy him. He contemplates doing a Discord podcast, but decides against it - he doesn’t think he’ll be particularly entertaining at this hour. Besides, he’s still trying to get better about not revealing so much, especially recently. A week ago he almost let it slip that he and George are sharing a bed, all because someone in chat asked a question about sleeping with a fan on and Dream hadn’t been able to keep his mouth shut. He winces at the memory. Yeah, probably best to not speak to a live audience when he’s this exhausted.

He decides getting out of his work space would be a good place to start, but once he steps out into the hall a thought occurs to him. He makes sure to keep his footsteps light as he head down to the first floor, the only sound in the house coming from the omnipresent hum of the AC. Flicking on the light at the base of the stairs, he’s surprised to see Patches trod up to the meet him, her tail flicking in the air.

“Hey baby,” he greets, bending down to pick her up. “Thought you’d be upstairs with George.”

Despite Dream’s insistence to the contrary, he’s pretty sure George has become Patches' new favorite cuddle partner. Half the time the two of them could be found napping together, and George had also taken to carrying her around the house when he was bored. He had a particular fondness for holding her up in front of mirrors and saying *It’s you!* when she started to contemplate her reflection.

Once they reach the kitchen, Dream carefully sets her down on the ground and goes to grab her a

treat to keep her busy. She happily accepts it, munching quietly in the corner while Dream begins to sift through the cabinets, keeping the light in the room low to sooth his aching eyes. It doesn't take long for him the track down what he needs - flour, yeast, a cup of water. Their kitchen is much better organized than it used to be, a byproduct of it getting so much more use since George's arrival. Before, Dream saw grocery shopping as a chore and eating as a usually inconvenient necessity. Now, he takes a great deal of pride in how well stocked their fridge is, how their fruit bowl overflows. Before, the room had looked borderline sterile. Now, it looks well-loved.

Dream tracks down the mixing bowl and an apron, knotting it around his waist. He gets about halfway through measuring out the ingredients before the sound of footsteps approach from the hall. He turns around to see George standing in the doorway, rubbing at his eyes, looking like he quite literally just rolled out of bed in a pair of plaid pajama pants and one of Dream's old t-shirts, which comes down to rest at his mid-thigh. Dream's brain goes fuzzy at the sight. He looks downright edible.

"Hey," Dream greets, keeping his voice quiet. "Thought you were sleeping."

Judging by the mused state of George's hair, he probably was.

"I was, for a bit," he confirms, his voice scratchy, which sends a pleasant buzz down Dream's spine. He reaches a hand out, beckoning George into the room. George goes willingly, stepping underneath Dream's arm and tucking himself against his side. Dream welcomes him in, wrapping his arm firmly around his shoulder.

"Did I wake you?" Dream asks. George shakes his head.

"Wanted water," he murmurs into the fabric of Dream's hoodie. "What are you doing?"

"Uh, I needed a break from editing," Dream explains, suddenly feeling bashful. "So I thought I'd make bread."

George perks up at the words, titling his chin to look up at Dream.

"Really?" He asks. Dream nods. George looks around the room, surveying the ingredients Dream has laid out.

"Ok," he says. "Can I help?"

Dream frowns. "George, it's two in the morning. You sure you don't wanna go back to sleep?"

"No, no I'm awake now," George insists, widening his eyes for emphasis. "And I wanna help."

A slow smile spreads across Dream's face.

"Yeah, alright," he agrees. "Of course. Here, uh, you can measure out the flour."

George does, and soon Dream is walking him through the rest of the steps; activating the yeast, oiling up the mixing bowl, forming the dough. Dream takes over when it comes time to start kneading and George watches at his shoulder, enraptured.

"You like watching my hands?" He asks teasingly. George pinches his side.

"Shut up," he mutters, but doesn't deny it.

George takes his own turn too, putting his full weight into kneading, yelping when the dough starts

to stick to his fingers. Patches weaves between his feet, sniffing the air curiously. The whole kitchen smells like yeast, and between the two of them, they're able to wrangle the dough into a respectable shape and place it in the bowl to rise. Dream covers it with a small towel, setting it aside.

"Now what?" George asks, pausing to wash his hands.

"We wait," Dream says, bumping him with his hip to make room at the sink. George groans.

"Ugh, I forgot how long this takes," he grumbles.

"I know," Dream says. "But it'll be worth it."

George looks over at him, an eyebrow raised. Dream offers a small grin.

"Besides," he says. "I'm sure we can think of ways to occupy ourselves in the meantime."

This peaks George's interest. In a second, he has Dream backed up against the counter, his hands caging Dream in at the hips. Dream lets out a surprised laugh.

"See, I was thinking more like we could watch a show-" he lies, smiling down at George slyly.

"Stop talking," George insists, and kisses him. Dream lets himself fall into it, once again feeling like a planet pulled into the orbit of George's great, all-encompassing sun. He can feel the small of his back dig into the hard marble behind him, but he tugs George closer all the same, wrapping his arms around his waist as George goes boneless in his grasp. Dream feels his desire like a blow to the head. In an instant, he wants to do *everything*; drop to his knees right there, carry George back upstairs, take him apart, ask George to do the same to him. Then, George opens his mouth wider, deepening the kiss, and Dream remembers that he *will* get to do everything he wants. They both will, in due time. But for now, he is more than content to just be here, with George, in whatever way he'll have him.

"How long does it take to rise?" George asks, breathless when they separate.

"Forever," Dream breathes, unable to tear his eyes away from George's kiss-dark, swollen lips.

"We could be here all night."

George grins. "You're just saying that cause you like kissing me."

"Am I that obvious?" Dream asks, already knowing the answer. When George laughs, it sounds like every beautiful sound Dream's ever heard; the chime on his first bike, the starting chord of his favorite song, the echo of rain against pavement. Dream's always been confident in some facts of the universe, reliant on science when everything else around him feels too fickle to trust. But looking at George now, it seems as indisputable as gravity that they were made for each other. Dream could follow that fact all the way home, brighter and more unwavering than any north star.

"Always have been," George says, fondness making his eyes crinkle at the edges, and pulls Dream in again.

In truth, Dream does lose track of the time. The night is dark and complete outside their window, and he's sure they really could spend forever here, wrapped up in each other. Of course, the logical part of his brain knows that's impossible. His life has never followed a predictable path. The future will remain an inconstant, ever-changing variable. And yet, Dream has never been more sure of himself. If he is never able to count on anything else, he knows he is safe to put his faith in this, in *them*.

It's simple, really. Dream loves George. George loves him right back. And Dream knows this to be true, knows it by the way George holds him, by the way he says his name. Knows it in a way that supersedes all his self-doubt, that makes all his uncertainties feel small and insignificant, a mere drop of water to the unending ocean of George's love.

He knows the lives they are building together have just begun, that the home they have found in each other is one that will only grow with time. He knows he is made better by George's love, knows that he will never be as cruel to himself as he was before, knows George would never allow him to exercise that sort of unkindness again. More than anything, Dream knows that he is safe in George's love, and that George is safe in his, an often spoken, always felt agreement that they will take care of each other, even when it's not easy, especially when it's hard. And he knows soon, George will pull away and smile at him, and joy will settle warm in Dream's chest, and they'll eat the bread together, once it bakes.

Chapter End Notes

i dont even know where to begin. thank you all so much for reading, i really cannot put into words how much everyones support and kindness has meant to me over these past months. this fic, like any good meal, was a labor of love, so thank u for letting me share it with you

ive met so many wonderful people through the process of writing this fic, and im so incredibly grateful to all of them. if u have been here with me every update since the beginning, u have a special place in my heart. the amount of talent in this fandom continues to blow me away everyday, and im honored to consider so many of my fellow writers my friends. forever grateful to this fic for introducing me to so many of them.

i wrote this fic in part because during a very difficult period of my life, the people i loved cooked for me and brought me meals to show how much they cared. so many of my memories of love take place in the kitchen. my life has been shaped by the people who made sure i ate well.

much love to u all!

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